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ABSTRACT

These four issues of a quarterly publication for gifted educators and parents of gifted children span winter 2002 through fall 2002. Featured articles include: (1) "Cultivating Courage, Creativity, and Caring" (James T. Webb), which discusses the need to encourage the development of courage and caring, as well as creativity in gifted students; (2) "Is College an Appropriate Environment for the Profoundly Gifted Child?" (Beth Wright), which discusses the obstacles of admittance to colleges for young gifted students; (3) "Reading the Poet of Transformation: Ovid" (Michael E. Walters); (4) "Abraham Lincoln: A Hero for the Ages Seen through the Prism of Multiple Intelligences" (Jerry Flack); (5) "Shakespeare Sampler: A Unit to Connect Elementary Gifted Students to Shakespeare" (Jane P. Mitchell); (6) "Black History and Giftedness" (Michael E. Walters); (7) "Stand Up for Gifted Children: Advocacy in the School and Home" (Joan Franklin Smutny); (8) "Is Your School Setting Healthy or Toxic?" (Lisa Rivero), which discusses social and emotional needs of gifted children, how educational settings influence student development, and characteristics of healthy educational environments; (9) "An Appreciation of John Steinbeck (1902-68)" (Michael E. Walters); (10) "Raising Expectations of Children from Poverty" (Carol Horn), which provides techniques for improving the academic performance of economically disadvantaged gifted students; (11) "The Importance of the Humanities in Confronting Evil in the World" (Andrew Flaxman); (12) "Performing Arts Instruction for Exceptionally and Profoundly Gifted Children" (Beth Wright), which discusses key issues crucial to the successful integration of gifted education theory in arts instruction; and (13) "The Re-Invention of the Educational Wheel" (Michael E. Walters). Most articles include references. (CR)

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# Gifted Education Press Quarterly, 2002

Maurice D. Fisher, Editor

Gifted Education Press Quarterly v16 n1-4 Win-Fall 2002

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# *GIFTED EDUCATION PRESS QUARTERLY*

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I want to express my deepest sympathy to the families and friends of those who were killed or injured in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. As the most generous nation in history, we must rid the world of the fanatical groups and individuals who planned and implemented this tragedy. I was very impressed with educators and psychologists in the Northern Virginia area who worked with children and families directly affected through the loss of relatives and friends in the Pentagon. The unity and determination of our people will overcome this assault on the United States and Western civilization.

Congratulations to members of our advisory panel who have recently published the following books: • **Stand Up for Your Gifted Child: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home** (2001, Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.) by Joan Smutny. This book provides parents with useful information about all aspects of the gifted education field including chapters on understanding giftedness, gifted education and taking a stand. • **Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet** (2001, Basic Books) by Howard Gardner (and coauthors Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and William Damon). They discuss how individuals in genetics and journalism can simultaneously maintain high levels of creativity and ethical standards; the implication of this study is that good work and ethical behavior can be developed by individuals who choose these and other knowledge-based fields.

Welcome to the newest member of our advisory panel, Margaret Gosfield. She is editor of the ***Gifted Education Communicator*** – a national journal published by the California Association for the Gifted that contains excellent research articles, literature reviews and columns written by Joan Smutny and Carol Tomlinson. I wish Ms. Gosfield much success with her new publication, and highly recommend it to ***GEPQ*** readers.

This issue contains an intriguing article by James Webb, publisher of Great Potential Press, on some of the affective factors associated with giftedness. I asked Dr. Webb to relate his essay to the events of September 11, 2001. His discussion highlights some of the characteristics teachers and parents should nurture to encourage the development of positive giftedness. The second article by Beth Wright, a home schooling parent, illustrates the problems her gifted child has encountered in obtaining early admission to university courses. Dr. Michael Walters completes this issue with an essay on Ovid's poem, ***Metamorphoses*** – stories of transformations in the ancient world that are relevant to current problems.

**Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher**

# CULTIVATING COURAGE, CREATIVITY AND CARING

**BY JAMES T. WEBB, Ph.D. SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA**

Terrorist attacks have changed our way of living. We no longer take for granted our physical safety or personal freedoms. We are confronted with the fact that we live in a global community where it is essential that we understand persons from other cultures, and that we help them understand us as well. The events remind us that very bright persons can engage in horrendously hurtful acts. The implications, to my mind, are that we -- as educators and as parents -- must not try only to develop the intellect of the children in our care, but also must consider values as well.

Some years ago, Professor Joseph Renzulli (1981) gave us a very helpful triad model for identifying and understanding key components of giftedness. Renzulli found that gifted adults consistently showed three characteristics—above average ability, creativity, and high task commitment. In his triad, Renzulli presents three overlapping circles, each representing one component. According to this model, only when all three characteristics are present in substantial quantities at the same time is a person labeled as gifted.

Renzulli's triad has focused needed attention on important qualities needed by gifted students if they are to function successfully in our culture. Even so, Renzulli's triad is incomplete, and we need to consider other critical dimensions, particularly in the social and emotional functioning of gifted children and adults. Two key dimensions need to be added, for without these additional two dimensions a very bright person will be limited, handicapped, or even dangerous.

The two ingredients to be added are "courage" and "caring," both of which have a major impact when added to "motivation," "high ability" and "creativity." Further, it is important to note that "courage" and "caring" can be cultivated, along with creativity, motivation and intelligence, and that we as parents and teachers of our gifted children, have an obligation to them to guide and support them in these areas.

Though all five characteristics --above average ability, creativity, task commitment, courage, and caring -- are important, I think we need to focus particularly on cultivating courage, caring and creativity. Certainly, intellect and motivation are important, and much has been written about ways to enhance and encourage motivation as well as to develop intelligence. But our ability to influence intellectual ability is probably less than our ability to influence the other four areas. Even though high intellectual abilities are fundamental to any notion of giftedness, I am convinced that we can have only a modest influence on native intelligence for children beyond age eight (Bloom, 1964; Sattler, 2001). Certainly we know many things that might dramatically lower intelligence—for example lead poisoning, child abuse, brain injury, etc. But in contrast, few things can dramatically raise intellectual potential in any intellectual area, and even the long-term impact of infant and pre-school stimulation is limited (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein and Weikart, 1984).

Of course, courage and caring are *not* limited to persons of higher intellectual or creative abilities. But there is a *particular* need to develop and cultivate courage and caring within our bright children, if for no other reason than because the prevailing myth in our society is that these children do not need any special help, and can make it on their own (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). Caring and courage are not going to come automatically to our children just because they are gifted. Gifted children, particularly those not yet identified as such, may be even *less* likely to acquire courage and caring precisely *because* of our neglect and lack of understanding of them.

In fact, there are particular issues concerning courage and caring that arise *because* one is gifted. For example, it is widely recognized that gifted and creative children are intense and often excessive, that being creative implies being non-conformist, and that the interests of these children often differ from their age peers. So often they are faced with trying to figure out "Where do I, in the upper 3%, fit in a school system with a lock-step curriculum that is primarily designed for the other 97%, and in a system where conformity and mediocrity are valued more than intellectual curiosity and creativity" (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). Gifted children also often must learn to control their impatience, and learn to feel less like an alien (Hollingworth, 1975). And their asynchronous development -- particularly of profoundly gifted children -- can leave them puzzled about themselves.

Before considering the interaction of courage, creativity and caring, however, it is helpful to look at each of these individually. For over a century, creativity has been considered a legitimate field of study, if a puzzling one (Tannenbaum, 1983). Investigators seem to recognize creativity only after it has occurred, but have difficulty defining it or predicting who will demonstrate it. In early studies, creativity often was treated as synonymous with intelligence. More recently, creativity has been considered a separate, but related, area of study. During the past 30 years research has shown that when IQs are in the gifted or higher range, intelligence and creative ability are generally independent of one another, and that neither can be measured adequately by the same test (Sattler, 2001; Piirto, 1998; Tannenbaum, 1983). Few persons disagree, though, that usually a person must have at least above average intelligence in order

to be thought of as creative (Amabile, 1983; Piirto, 1998).

That does not imply that persons who are less bright are never innovative or creative. Certainly they are. But their creativity is occasional, rather than frequent or constant, and their mental leaps to make creative connections are typically much more modest. Like the concept of intelligence, creativity is defined in relative terms. That is, no one is without intelligence. Similarly, most people have at least some creativity, although some people clearly have more than others.

Intelligence and creativity both involve the ability to profit from past experiences. However, intelligence (at least as measured by our current intelligence and achievement tests) rests more heavily on memory as well as on convergent and culturally typical thinking, whereas creativity implies divergent and unusual thinking and the ability to develop knowledge, patterns or relations new to the culture or the situation (Sattler, 2001).

Disagreement exists as to whether new creative knowledge must be socially useful. For example, Frank Barron (1969), a psychologist pioneer in creativity research, stated that the achievements in creativity not only must be original, but also must make a meaningful contribution to the culture. I believe we must consider creative behaviors as separate from the social benefit aspects of creativity. We must think of the creative *process* as a potential, that may—or may not—become manifest in socially beneficial behavior, but which can be creative nonetheless. For example, the creativity shown by elementary school children seldom is socially beneficial (some even would call it detrimental), but it can be creative nonetheless. We should not confuse the product with the process. If we focus on the process, we can contemplate ways to cultivate creativity so that long-term beneficial products might result, rather than passively hoping that creative products might develop *au natural*.

What is courage? Creativity? Caring? All are personal qualities that are as difficult to quantify as the concepts of intelligence and motivation, although we all share some common idea of these concepts. As simple working definitions, let me say that creativity is basically that quality necessary to produce original ideas in any field. It leaves us discontented with the *status quo*. Courage is that quality of mind which meets opposition or danger with calmness and firmness. It allows us to act even when we are unsure or afraid. Caring is having compassion, concern or interest in someone or something outside of ourselves.

I do not believe that these qualities are simply innate, even though people may be born with certain predispositions toward more or less of each. Instead, like most other human behaviors, they are primarily learned. And because they develop over time, they must be nurtured in the beginning stages of development and receive opportunities to be practiced.

But how much of each is needed? Is there a perfect balance? How do you balance courage, creativity and caring within yourself?

Probably there is not a perfect balance, although certainly we need at least some of all three. However, depending on the amount of our courage, the depth of our caring, or the facileness of our creativity, our lives will be quite different. It is also likely that the balance and proportion of these three within each of us will shift at different times in our lives, depending on the opportunities we have to develop these traits, the preparation we receive to allow further growth, and the life situations we face. And perhaps it is predictable that we will shift the balance at different times in our lives as we mature and gather perspective from life experiences. For example, I suspect that courage and caring for most of us has increased as we get older, though I am unsure about creativity. In some ways we may become less creative and more rigid in our thinking as we get older.

What happens if there is an imbalance? What happens when a bright, intense, motivated person is below average in courage, or in creativity, or in caring? In my experience, the most obvious imbalances are those involving courage and caring. A lack of creativity creates fewer difficulties for people, as compared to a lack of courage or caring. Also, creativity is often carried out privately, and thus has fewer apparent risks than to be courageous or caring.

What happens when a bright, intense, motivated person is below average in caring, or in courage, or in creativity?

**High Courage and Creativity, but Low Caring**

Novel games and creative fantasies can be invented in a moral or ethical vacuum without regard for the impact on others. Sometimes these persons become "*Trivial Pursuers*." I have mixed feelings about Trivial Pursuers. On the one hand they give us pleasant pastimes that help us keep our sense of humor and perspective, and we badly need a sense of humor -- particularly in our often absurd and tragic world. On the other hand some trivial pursuers become "Self-absorbed Narcissists" who simply escape from others by playing non-productively with their ideas with little regard for any effects their behaviors might have on personal or environmental resources.

Other such creative persons become "Indifferent Investigators." They create just to see what will happen. Often their results are benign, or sometimes accidentally helpful. Still others, as history shows, indulge their creativity with no regard for others. It amazes me that so many researchers still adhere to the dictum of creating knowledge for knowledge's sake, with little regard whether their efforts are trivial or even hazardous.

Fortunately, most gifted individuals at some point in their lives find such narcissistic creativity in a moral vacuum begins to feel very hollow. They realize that anything not worth doing is not worth doing well. Their creativity often lacks value if it was

developed without values that have much meaning for existence.

It is indeed fortunate for our world that gifted children generally move quickly toward the upper levels of moral development described by the ethicist, Kohlberg (1964). That is, most gifted persons reach a point of being personally concerned with universal principles, morality, consistency and principles of conscience. Although only about 10% of our general population reaches such an advanced level of concerns, and then typically in middle age, the intellect of most gifted individuals stimulates them to reach that point, and at a much younger age.

However, some creative persons do not reach these upper levels of moral development, or are delayed in development. These gifted persons have developed courage but little, if any, caring, and are of even greater concern. I could call this pattern either the "*Brave Machiavellian*" or the "*Gifted Terrorist*." Bright, courageous, intense -- this Brave Machiavellian has much creativity, but little compassion or empathy. The end justifies the means. He wants what he wants when he wants it, and his creativity is directed primarily at new and better ways to get what he wants or to control others. People are objects to be managed or manipulated.

Parents, particularly of gifted teenagers, may feel I am speaking about their children. Fortunately, I am not, even though most teenagers do go through a protracted period of narcissistic self-absorption, and I do see an incredible number of youngsters these days with little empathy. Actually, I have in mind adults who never developed caring and empathy, or who lost the caring they once had through cynicism and anger. Remember, most of our totalitarian and repressive dictators have been bright, motivated, highly creative and even courageous—but they were out of balance on caring. On a local level we see this pattern in our gifted juvenile delinquents or our adult criminals, and even in the creative schemes of some of our political and societal leaders. The inventions conceived by such persons are neutral at best, harmful at worst, but innovative and powerful!

I would like to say that this pattern is a rare one. I am not sure that I can honestly say that. For example, in the United States we have a higher proportion of our population in prisons than virtually any other major country. Some leaders in gifted education (e.g., Harvey & Seeley, 1984) have estimated that well beyond five percent of our juvenile delinquents could be defined as gifted and creative.

We are a violent world, and a self-centered one. The recent terrorist attacks highlight this, and give reality to Tannenbaum's (2001) statement that "talents are sometimes turned into destructive forces..." and "...gifted villains can...use their combination of brains and hate-filled overexcitabilites to threaten the quality, and even the existence, of life on our planet." (p. 101)

Even within the United States the popular press has noted that we are more likely to personally experience violent crime today than if we had lived on the Wild West Frontier, that time in our history that we have come to believe was so fiercely dangerous. When we look at what we have done to our environment -- this spaceship earth -- and how our culture so often treats objects and people as disposable, we see much ingenuity and often courageous entrepreneurship, but little caring.

Perhaps the term Gifted Terrorist is too strong for most persons who have courage and creativity, but not caring. Perhaps it would be more accurate to consider them as "*Unguided Missiles*," particularly our younger gifted individuals. These are the gifted "hackers" who break into computer systems, or who in other creative ways courageously pinch the noses of authorities around them. Their beliefs and values that may later culminate in caring are still in flux and have not yet crystallized. They still can be influenced by us -- as we were by those around us -- to become more caring and compassionate. Indeed, it is our responsibility to cultivate these traits.

**High Creativity and Caring, but Low Courage**.

A second kind of imbalance occurs when courage is underdeveloped. These creative persons care deeply about others and about their impact on the world, and long to have a meaningful place in it. However, creative action is restricted or blocked because of shyness, fear or anxiety, or because of a depressing and paralyzing awareness of how limited one person's impact on the world typically is.

Perhaps we can call this type the "*Appeaser*" or "*Avoider*," or the "*Overwhelmed Withdrawer*." Because their beliefs and values have not yet coalesced into a firm enough base, or because self-confidence is lacking, the Avoider cannot come to act even though contemplating a creative or caring action. Many bright persons particularly find it difficult to develop such courage exactly because they care so greatly and want to be fair to all concerned, because they are bright enough to see the implications of the problems, and because they intensely desire to be thorough in considering all of the issues at hand. There is a saying that "A person who can see all sides of an issue is unable to act."

It is difficult and painful to be frozen in inactivity when one cares so deeply, and even more so if the area of one's creative endeavors happens to be socially unpopular at that time. Since creativity typically involves challenging traditions, popularity can be at risk. Indeed, others often become uncomfortable when traditions are challenged (Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982). One often must choose between one's beliefs and being popular.

Sometimes these bright people feel particularly isolated and alone because they lack the courage to disclose themselves to others. It is like the title of the popular book, *Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am* (Powell, 1969). They fear that their ideas and concerns might not be viewed by others as important.

Because they can see so many alternatives, they are filled with self-doubt. And to the extent they are perfectionists, they set high standards for themselves, and expect others to do the same. They are reluctant to reveal themselves until they feel that they have met their own incredibly high standards, for to do otherwise would be hypocritical. Their fertile minds uncover every flaw in their own thinking and action, and every reason why their creative solutions would not work, or would not be sufficiently helpful, or are unimportant. They are self-critical, even perfectionistic, and run the risk of a burnt-out depression. They lack a firm base of assuredness and solid self-concept that is necessary to act courageously and to feel comfortable with oneself afterwards.

The early U.S. President, John Quincy Adams, as chronicled in Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* (1964), suffered such agonies even though he evidently mustered courage on numerous occasions. At age 45, after having already served as U.S. Senator, Harvard professor, and American minister to several major European powers, he wrote "Two-thirds of a long life have passed, and I have done nothing to distinguish it by usefulness to my country and to mankind..." At age 70, having distinguished himself as Secretary of State, as an eloquent member of Congress, and as a courageous and independent President, he stated that his "...whole life has been a succession of disappointments. I can scarcely recall a single instance of success in anything I undertook..."

In the same way that gifted persons can see what they might be, they equally keenly can see how they are falling short of how they might be. How important it is for bright persons to learn how to care themselves! Truly creative persons who become eminent and make a mark have an almost burdensome sense of destiny and responsibility as a human being, and almost inevitably a measure of egotism. Their creative drive is a force that will not let them be still, and is a drive that cannot be denied, only managed. Their self-caring, if they are to be successful, includes a degree of resoluteness, and the courage to believe in the worth and validity of their creative efforts. Almost all highly effective, creative individuals suffer intense periods of frustration and depression and self-doubt -- the "positive disintegration" the Dabrowski Theory describes (Piechowski, 1991; Silverman, 1993). But highly effective gifted persons learn ways to override these moods and concerns through a pervasive caring and a passionate, courageous commitment to their creative pursuit.

**High Courage and Caring, but Low Creativity.**

And finally, what if creativity is lacking? These caring, courageous souls typically implement the plans of others. They are our "*Consolidators*." Intellectually bright in their convergent thinking, they often consolidate the giant strides taken by other more creative, but less organized, companions. In one sense they are fortunate, for they do not seem to struggle so keenly with the paradox of forsaking the organization of current knowledge for the chaos involved in creating new knowledge. To the degree that you and I use rigid categories, we allow ourselves to organize our knowledge and experiences in systematic ways that give apparent meaning to our existence. But on the other hand, we limit our options for new knowledge if we do not creatively upset our current traditions. As psychologist George Kelley (1955) noted, we are constrained to experience events in the way we anticipate them. Thus, persons who are less creative are somewhat protected from the uncertainties that accompany lack of structure, and often are appreciated because they are competent synthesizers or consolidators. These Consolidators nonetheless may encounter two particular difficulties. They may find themselves undervalued as compared with their flashier, more creative counterparts (and they may underplay their own value, which is substantial), and they continually must be careful to avoid being manipulated by others who would take advantage of them.

The ideal, of course, is to possess all three -- courage, creativity and caring -- and in relatively large amounts. Some gifted persons who have achieved this are familiar to us: Ghandi, Albert Schweitzer, Dag Hammarksjold, Helen Keller, George Washington Carver, Madame Curie, Martin Luther King, Jr. It is from these persons that we can learn much. Not a single one, however, offers a simple picture of the motivations, abilities and accomplishments that would allow a clear formula. Each shows complexities, inconsistencies, self-doubts, and continuing struggles at self-management in the areas of courage and caring.

Born in 1869 in India and transplanted to South Africa where he first openly challenged traditional social class roles, Ghandi for years creatively inspected his own learning, his religion, his social relationships, and the traditions of those around him. Though a devout Hindu, he was not orthodox. In his forties, he creatively challenged entire social systems, and confronted the greatest existing military power -- the British Empire -- using a force that had nothing to do with guns or bombs. The very creativity of opposing force with non-force. By using love and truth, he led three hundred and fifty million Indians in a non-violent revolution that combined courage and caring with creativity. In 1925, at age 56, his sense of destiny was demonstrated by his writing of an autobiography entitled *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*.

Martin Luther King, Jr. did the same thing. Faced with traditions of servitude, liberally laced with violent oppression if the traditions were challenged, King allowed himself to "have a dream" of caring, unity and equality, and courageously set about to make that dream a reality. I was in the Deep South during that time, and witnessed the repeated creativity with which non-violent civil disobedience was used to oppose immoral laws of segregation and discrimination. Like Ghandi, King recognized that always there is a price to be paid when one challenges traditions, since that sort of creativity -- like many other creative ventures -- causes discomfort and anxiety in those nearby because the comfortable status quo is disrupted and

predictability is no longer guaranteed. Courageously and caringly aware of the discomfort he created in the status quo, Dr. King carefully and systematically implemented his non-violent creativity, and made major gains until cut down by an assassin's bullet.

Maya Angelou found her creativity in writing, an act that took great personal courage and caring. Raised in Stamps, Arkansas, exposed to a limited and stifling education as a Black in the Deep South, sexually molested at age eight by her mother's boyfriend, she retreated into a world of silence, refusing to speak. She was afraid that by speaking she might cause harm to happen to others since she personally felt partly responsible for being molested. She cared keenly, though not wisely, at that age. Thanks to a mentor, she was given the acceptance and love that enabled her to find the courage to express her creative and caring perceptions of the world around her through writing books such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

Dag Hammarskjold, a remarkably gifted man who spoke six languages and rose to Secretary-General of the United Nations, chronicled in his diary, *Markings* (1964), his continuing internal struggle to maintain courage and caring along with his creativity. His caring often was almost overwhelming, at the expense of his own well-being. Trying to promote world understanding and harmony, he found himself working twenty hours per day, and yet experienced bouts of inadequacy and depression because he could see so much that still needed to be done, and felt he was doing so little to accomplish the tasks. As is true with many such people, virtually none of his friends knew how driven and struggling he felt until they read *Markings* after his death.

Paul Tillich, the noted theologian who wrote *The Courage To Be* (1952), courageously encountered the challenges thrown at him by existential philosophers who held that life was arbitrary and absurd. Tillich pointed out that caring inherently assumes that life and the present have meaning, and that we must have belief in the meaningfulness of our values, including the courage to take a leap of faith to embrace those values. Writers such as he have helped greatly those people struggling with existential depression -- a depression centering on issues of life's meaning, and which is limited almost exclusively to people of high intellect and creativity.

These names are famous. Yet most of us are surrounded by gifted and creative people not yet so well known or eminent, but who are struggling to obtain, balance, and interlock these three rings of courage, creativity and caring. Indeed, all five ingredients—courage, caring, creativity, task commitment, and intellect—must be intertwined. As parents, teachers, or other professionals, we can help these bright youngsters, even while we, ourselves, may be struggling with the same issues. I think we can cultivate these ingredients, and that indeed we must cultivate them.

If we plan to cultivate creativity, inspire motivation, and promote intelligence, we also have the responsibility to cultivate courage and caring. Currently, we teach courage and caring sparingly, if at all, at home or at school. Only a few relevant books, such as *Teaching Values* (Davis, 1996a) and *Values are Forever* (Davis, 1996b) are reaching mainstream education despite our lip service toward "character education." Despite Steve Allen's (2001) crusade to raise the standards of popular culture, our society seems more interested in marketing TV programs which demonstrate incompetence, air-headed lack of consideration, intolerance, or even violence and betrayal, rather than in providing reasonable models of how men, women and children might meaningfully, caringly and courageously relate to each other.

Where do we begin in such cultivation? First, we must allow creative persons to be. This sounds simple, but often is not. Paul Torrance -- a grand leader of creativity -- has on several occasions noted that society is actually savage toward creative thinkers, especially when they are young. Yet, the creative person, in a sense, does something for all of us simply by being. We must remember that seldom do we need to make major modifications in the other person to make him be creative like we think he should be creative.

Even if changes are needed to direct a child's growth, the changes need not be accomplished immediately. It is better to bend the twig a little each day than to push the branch suddenly. Through such gentle shaping we help ourselves also to become gentler with our own creativity. As we suggest in *Guiding the Gifted Child* (1982), "Flowing with, rather than fighting against" is generally best.

If you and I are to cultivate creativity, we must provide our creative young minds with a refuge -- at home, in our resource rooms, in our libraries, museums and classes. In doing so, we can model courage as we advocate for our gifted children, rather than avoiding confrontation with others who feel that gifted children need no special help.

Also, we must help our creative children learn to care for themselves. It is not possible, I believe, to truly care for your creations or to care about others until you learn to care for yourself. Only then can you feel an importance about what you do, and that you are a person of value and meaning. If you are to trust your own judgment, you must see your values and judgment as worth trusting -- a stance that demands courage as well as caring. If you are in a minority -- as gifted children are, self-trust becomes even more important, for the temptation can be great to adopt the beliefs of the majority.

Particularly is courage and self-caring needed if one is to become a leader of a creative cause. Yet, how seldom do we teach our children to nurture themselves, to believe in themselves, and to praise themselves for courageous attempts. More typically, I believe, we expose them, to sarcasm and ridicule for their eccentric ideas and their foolish, non-traditional

behaviors. We must exude caring and respect to them if we expect them to be caring toward themselves and others.

Bright, creative persons must be more inner-directed in motivation than if they were part of the mainstream. Why do I feel so strongly about the inner-directedness of self-concept? Let me mention some names, along with related events perhaps not known as widely. Ludwig Beethoven's music teacher once said of him, "As a composer, he is hopeless." Thomas Edison's teachers told him he was too stupid to learn anything. A newspaper editor fired Walt Disney because he had "no good ideas." F.W. Woolworth at age 21 worked in a dry goods store, but his bosses would not let him wait on customers because he "didn't have any sense." Enrico Caruso's music teacher told him, "You can't sing; you have no voice at all." Werner Von Braun failed ninth grade algebra; Louis Pasteur was rated as "mediocre" in chemistry in college. And Louisa May Alcott (the author of *Little Women*) was told by an editor that she could never write anything that had popular appeal.

What if these creative individuals had believed the evaluations of those knowledgeable adults around them? What if they had listened to the negative, and had not pursued their dreams courageously?

To help creative children learn to care for themselves, we must help them understand their styles of thinking -- so often divergent -- and the implications of that style. We must convey that unusual interests and thinking patterns are not simply nerdy, or weird, or indications of mental illness. We must teach them that divergent thinking can be valuable, and that paradoxes come along with creativity. And we must teach them the courage necessary to pursue those paradoxes. Barbara Kerr, in her book *Smart Boys* (2001), has pointed out that this can be a particular challenge for bright boys in today's culture.

If we are to have fully functioning gifted children and adults, we must cultivate the characteristics of courage, creativity and caring by modeling them ourselves, and by exposing our children to others who can serve as models. If you and I are to make a difference in the world we live in, we ***must*** use ourselves, our own experiences, and our own consciousness to teach our children. But such teaching goes far beyond simply imparting information.

We must try our best to give our children seven important gifts. They need the:

- knowledge to know the questions
- freedom to ask the questions
- caring to want to pursue the answers
- flexibility to create new answers when the old ones no longer work
- stamina to pursue the answers
- humanness to care about the outcome
- courage to act with integrity.

What I am proposing is idealistic, but I think that parents and educators of gifted children must be idealistic. We must be concerned with the interactions of creativity, courage and caring -- along with motivation and ability. In this way we will be able to model idealism for our youth.

Recently, I heard a minister describe how often she heard people saying, "How could God allow this to happen?" She mused that perhaps God was up there saying to us, "How could you allow this to happen?"

As we contemplate our roles in today's world, I encourage you to remember a saying attributed to Bishop Flavian:

"And what is as important as knowledge?" asked the Mind.
"Caring, and seeing with the heart," answered the soul.

May we cultivate the courage to care and to seek creative solutions to help our gifted youth.

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## IS COLLEGE AN APPROPRIATE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE PROFOUNDLY GIFTED CHILD?

**BY BETH WRIGHT NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA**

Last week my son and I visited the campus of a local community college. Hoping to gain dual enrollment status for Octavian, now 13 years-old, I went there bearing his California Achievement Test score that places him in the 99th percentile of rising high school juniors, the letter we receive every year from the school board that verifies our homeschool status, and a home-brewed transcript documenting all of the high school courses he has accomplished, 67 credits in all.

We were met with a polite insistence that no one under the age of 16 may attend community college in Virginia. Apparently, the college is in the practice of telling parents of underage children that a state policy precludes the admittance of anyone under the age of 18, and dual enrollment, the only exception, is allowed only for those 16 and older. I was not the first parent to be turned away this summer.

Assistants to the dean of instruction and other secretaries, offered me their opinions regarding the reason for this "policy" as I waited for them to comply with my request for a written copy of this policy. The assistant to the dean of instruction called numerous departments in search of someone who could make me a copy. No one seemed to be able to locate the elusive document. Each insisted that it existed, yet none had ever seen it. I was willing to wait while they all searched their files.

We whiled the time away chatting about my son's experiences at nearby College of William and Mary. I explained to them that he had taken Latin Literature there during the spring 2001 semester as a dual enrollment student. As I fielded questions from these kindly dean's assistants, my son waited patiently in the lobby.

So many of the ladies' questions echoed those asked by other adults-in-charge that I wondered for a moment if there was some sort of conspiracy. Or perhaps, I thought, I was absent the day they taught this segment of social studies in grade school. Universally, the adults are concerned about issues such as:

- Can he understand adult social issues prevalent in college

classrooms?

- Can he get along with the young adults in class?
- Will he be emotionally capable of being in the environment?
- Will he be able to accomplish such academically challenging work?

As I listened to them insist that children do not belong in a classroom with adults, I thought about the profoundly gifted children I know. I thought about the research performed in the areas of brain function, pedagogy for the highly gifted, behavioral characteristics of the highly gifted, and other information existing since the 1920's. I thought about all the evidence that points to the fact that children like my son are not normal children at all, but unique in ways the general population does not understand.

Perhaps we are only just beginning to understand such differences. John Geake in an article entitled, ***The Gifted Brain***, offers validation for facts parents of profoundly gifted children have always known. "Haier and Benbow (1995) conducted a PET comparison of mathematical reasoning of mathematically gifted 13-year-olds vs. college students (both scored 1100/1400 on SAT-M)...extremely mathematically gifted 13-year-olds had similar PET profiles to 20 year old math college students."

In the study, the researchers found that Positron Emission Tomography (PET), which measures increases in the brain cells' glucose metabolism using an injected radioactive tracer, demonstrated a remarkable similarity between the brain function of the profoundly gifted child and the young adult. But, then, haven't parents of the highly gifted always known they were little adults?

We lovingly call our profoundly gifted children "chronologically challenged" when describing the disparity between their bodies and their minds. The madcap implications of an adult in a child's body have tickled the fancy of Hollywood for years. But parents find little that is humorous when society denies their children's abilities, holding them to a standard any adult would find stultifying. And the parent forced to advocate for her highly gifted child may have to endure the "stage mom" stigma when she finds herself waiting in the admissions offices of colleges while they assert their right to deny her child access to their classes.

Savvy researchers and their studies in the field of gifted education become beacons of hope for parents. Yet, these beacons have existed since as early as 1926, and still I have to argue with a woman who has never even met my son over whether or not he can understand the social/moral issues that may fly around a college classroom.

Leta Hollingworth wrote in her masterly publication, ***Children Above 180 IQ***, "A child of 170 IQ can do all the studies that are at present required of him, with top 'marks' in about ¼ the time he is compelled to spend at school." (1926, p. 287).

If normal children are expected to accomplish primary and secondary school in 13 years, and the profoundly gifted child can do so in three to five years, where does that leave him? He may be between the ages of 7 and 11, depending on such factors as the number of grade skips he is allowed or the type of acceleration he undertook.

Just such a dilemma left our son without proper educational venues at the age of 10. The community college denied my son access to their classes. While we managed to provide him with several mentors and a tutor, it was several years before we were able to actualize his goal of taking a college class.

So, what then remains for the profoundly gifted child, who is not being properly educated in the system, or out of it? Like many other parents in such a position, I believed college to be the best choice for my son. College offers individual courses, a wide variety of interesting subjects, and well-educated instructors. When taken as an a la carte educational program overseen by the careful and judicious management of a parent, college offers the young gifted child all the academic challenge he needs. Why then, is it considered an appropriate "most radical acceleration" by some and an inappropriate risk by others?

Miraca Gross, in her keynote address presented at the 3rd Biennial Australasian International Conference on the Education of Gifted Students, said: "...gifted students differ from their age-peers in many aspects of their social and emotional development...and...well planned programs of acceleration enhance these students' self-esteem, their love of learning, their acceptance of themselves and their gifts, and their capacity to form warm and supportive friendships." (Gross, 1999)

If my son has similar brain function to that of a young adult, why shouldn't he be in the same educational venue as one? If he is passionately devoted to studying about ancient military warfare or the space-time continuum, why shouldn't he attend school with people capable of discussing such matters with him?

When the assistant to the dean asked me, "what about your son's socialization?" I responded, "how can my son be expected to enjoy the company of his age-peers in purely social circumstances if his interests include ancient Roman history and feudal Japan, his hobbies include inventing new "free energy" processes, his concerns are problems such as the state of our nation's military readiness, and his goals include being independently wealthy by the time he is 20 so that he may dedicate himself to full-time inventing in a home-laboratory? What will he discuss with other 13 year-olds? Perhaps they could spend some time shooting hoops and engaging in superficial discussions about school, sports, and music. But, then, my son favors classical music, fencing, and attends college. Where is the commonality?

Gross continues, "...we have, for our assistance and guidance, more than three quarters of a century of accumulated research on

the academic and psychosocial benefits of accelerated progression for gifted and talented students."

Why are the educators so reluctant to endorse acceleration if the research conducted supports its use? Not only does the research show favorable results for the gifted child being accelerated one, two, even five grade levels, but also for early college entrance. In her address, Gross makes mention of the fact that early college entrance as radical acceleration, "can work, and work superbly." A fact she confidently asserts based on, "...the evidence, from very many years of longitudinal research..." (Gross, 1999).

In their article entitled, ***Five Years of Early Entrance: Predicting Successful Achievement in College*** (1990), authors Assouline, Brody, and Stanley state: "A study of students who were early entrants at colleges and universities throughout the United States found that the majority of students were extremely successful academically and socially during their freshman year in college (Brody, Lupkowski, & Stanley, 1988)."

These children were found to be successful, both socially and academically. Why then, is college considered by some to be a risky venture for the profoundly gifted child?

Perhaps the problem is one of conditioning. How many people have actually met a profoundly gifted child? How can adults such as educators, legislators, college admissions directors, and other adults-in-charge have a frame of reference for our children when their only touchstones may be characters in the movies *Little Man Tate* and *Good Will Hunting*? Relatively rare according to the statistics, children with IQ scores of over 160 appear in the population at a ratio of fewer than 1 in 10,000. (Gross, 1999) Even psychologists specializing in gifted education may never meet a profoundly gifted child, and therefore, inadvertently relegate to that population the type of textbook-familiarity family doctors have with rare diseases.

Contrary to popular belief, high IQ does not simply indicate a larger quantity of the thing that makes one smart. Highly intelligent people possess qualities and characteristics that are entirely unique.

Mary-Elaine Jacobsen, Psy.D., writes in her excellent book, ***The Gifted Adult*** (1999): "the promise of high potential and creative intelligence is accompanied by a specific set of personality traits and inner processes -- not simply more of some attribute, but an altogether different quality of thinking and experiencing."

This, "different quality of thinking and experiencing" is what makes the profoundly gifted child different. Many researchers and advocates in the field of gifted education have delineated the characteristics of the profoundly gifted. We can look to their thorough work to inform our understanding of our children and validate our children's ability to transcend the experiences of normal children.

The Davidson Institute, a non-profit organization devoted to research, support and outreach for families of profoundly gifted children, offers a cache of wonderful articles in their online resource, PG-Cybersource. The following is featured on their site:

"Barbara Clark has reviewed the research of Dahlberg, Gross, Koppel, Lovecky and Silverman, and she compiled the following list of characteristics commonly found among individuals with extremely high intelligence levels:

- An extraordinary speed in processing information
- A rapid and thorough comprehension of the whole idea or concept
- An unusual ability to perceive essential elements and underlying structures and patterns in relationships and ideas
- A need for precision in thinking and expression
- An ability to relate to a broad range of ideas and synthesize commonalities among them
- A high degree of ability to think abstractly that develops early
- Appreciation of complexity; finding a myriad of alternative meanings in even the most simple issues or problems
- An ability to learn in an integrative, intuitive, non-linear manner
- An extraordinary degree of intellectual curiosity
- An unusual capacity for memory
- A long concentration span
- A fascination with ideas and words
- An extensive vocabulary
- Ability to perceive many sides of an issue."

The actual list includes more attributes, but I have selected the ones that demonstrate the profoundly gifted child's tendency toward sophisticated cognitive ability. Clark's list is much-needed proof of the fact that our children are not normal children at all, but in fact, unusual individuals capable of thinking and even acting like adults in many respects.

Gross states, "In children and adolescents emotional maturity is more closely related to mental age than to chronological age...intellectually gifted children are characterized by advanced affective (as well as cognitive) development." (Gross, 1999).

IQ testing may not tell us everything there is to know about our children, but it certainly illustrates the fact that they are not normal children. The profoundly gifted 10 year-old child with an IQ of 180 is mentally 18. Those 10 year-olds sporting IQs of 200 and over (some call "severely gifted") have the emotional and cognitive abilities of 20 year-old adults according to the mental-age correlation of intelligence testing using current instruments.

Taking into consideration all the research on the efficacy of early college classes for our most gifted, their mental ages according to IQ testing, and the accepted attributes of the profoundly gifted, how can society continue to abuse this population by depriving them of an appropriate education?

I left the community college last week without a copy of the document in question. No one was able to find it. All assured me, however of its existence and I was told there was no way for my son to attend their institution. That evening I spent several hours online researching the issue. I read all of the Virginia legislative code pertaining to education and community colleges. I read the 54-page policy manual for the Virginia Community College System and printed the section that dealt with admissions policies. Neither VCCS policy nor the VA code precludes the admittance of students younger than 18 to community college in Virginia. In fact, all admissions decisions are left to the individual community colleges regarding the admittance of those not meeting the eligibility requirements for general admission. "Other persons may apply to the admissions committee of the community college for special consideration for admittance to the community college," states the policy manual.

Did this information change the minds of the admissions department at this community college? Well, it certainly wedged my foot in the door that they told me was closed to my son. I called the following day to chat with the dean of instruction. I told him of my research and my conversations with various department heads in the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). I explained that I had read the policy manual and knew what it stipulates.

He offered to discuss my son's case with their director of enrollment management and assured me that she would review my son's files. He offered to arrange for her to call me right away. Very polite and businesslike, he accommodated my desire for further dialogue on the matter of enrolling my son.

It remains to be seen whether this college will provide academic stimulation for my son. The hurdles we face are formidable and entrenched in dogma. The rhetoric I heard is stale, "Our professors are not comfortable teaching children, we are sensitive to the K-12 public school system, and do not want to be viewed as teaching students that should be getting their academics from them, our student body is more homogeneous than William and Mary -- we have older adults and the classroom/campus environment reflects that difference."

Where does that leave my son, who simply wanted to take drafting in order to execute the designs for his inventions? Since he cannot take the drafting course as a single class at the local high school, I am not sure. But, I am sure that I will keep trying, keep advocating, keep looking, keep asking hard questions and keep finding the truth in order to give him every opportunity to grow.

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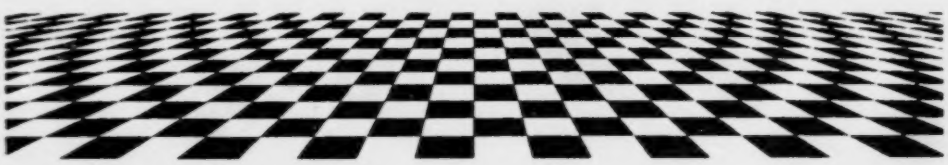
Beth Wright can be reached for comment or questions at:

beth@smartkidathome.com or through her website,

www.smartkidathom.com

# READING THE POET OF TRANSFORMATION: OVID

**BY MICHAEL E. WALTERS**

**CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES IN THE SCHOOLS**

In times of national crisis, gifted individuals can turn to the classics of literature in order to derive a perspective of the emotional and intellectual demands that occur during critical times. The word "classic" is used to describe a work of art that has timeless and enduring insights for the human condition. At a time when there is a seriousness everywhere, I found a needed perspective in the poetry of the Roman writer, Ovid (43 B.C.-17 A.D.).

Ovid's masterpiece was **The Metamorphoses**, a series of stories about major transformations in people and nature. In this book of poetry, Ovid commented on the human condition through his artistic interpretation of Greek and Roman mythology. However, the range of his imagery was that of the entire Mediterranean world (e.g., Egypt and Crete). Ovid described the turbulence of human desires and emotions in his Invocation (Book I). This psychological conflict is rooted in the simultaneous elements of change and continuity which are basic to the drama of being human. "Now I shall tell of things that change, new being/ Out of old: since you, O Gods, created/ Mutable arts and gifts, give me the voice/ To tell the shifting story of the world/ From its beginning to the present hour." (Book I, p. 31, Signet Classic edition, 2001).

Gifted individuals throughout the course of Western civilization have been captivated by Ovid. Among those profoundly influenced were Chaucer, Dante, Spencer and Shakespeare. The themes and characters of **The Metamorphoses** are constants throughout all of the artistic achievements of Western civilization, and have been expressed in paintings, sculptures and music. There is obviously something unique in Ovid's manner of writing and thinking that stimulates the gifted individual's sensibility. Shakespeare created metamorphic interpretations in his plays from characters and incidents based on the stories of writers such as Ovid. For example, in his fantasia on the theme of human desire, **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, Shakespeare included a play within a play that was a tragedy of ill-fated lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe. These lovers lived within estates divided by a bricked wall; their first meeting was through a "chink" in the wall. The parents adamantly opposed this love affair. Somehow, the lovers were able to meet but this rendevous ended in a tragedy of misunderstanding. A lioness accidently stained Thisbe's discarded cloak, and Pyramus committed suicide because he believed this animal devoured Thisbe. However, she was alive and waiting for her lover in a dark cave. She eventually came out, found Pyramus dead and then killed herself. What causes these tragic events is the passion of the two defiant lovers. In Shakespeare's **Romeo and Juliet**, a similar love affair led to the suicide of these individuals. Here is Ovid's description of the tragic lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe, in 8 A.D. -- : " 'Dark over the pitiful body of one lover/ Shall soon bear shade for two; O fateful tree/ Be the memorial of our twin deaths,/ And your dark fruit the colour of our mourning.'/ Then Thisbe placed sword's point beneath her breast/ The blade still warm with blood from her love's heart,/ And leaned upon it until she sank to earth./ Her prayers had reached the God's, had moved both parents:/ The ripe fruit of the tree turned deep rose colour;/ And they who loved sleep in a single urn." (Book IV, p. 116, Signet Classic edition, 2001).

Ovid was banished by the Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar, to a province (Tomis) near the Black Sea. It was a painful experience as he was removed from his readers and the cultural environment that stimulated and nurtured him. He was so distraught by his banishment that he almost destroyed his manuscripts and committed suicide. But he was discouraged from carrying out these self-destructive acts by his family and friends. Ovid's crime was "irreverence toward the state and it's ruler." Despite the blatant non-political aspects of his writing, the humanity of his treatment of human emotions was perceived as an insult to the Roman Emperor. This conflict between the artist's freedom of expression and political ideology has been a major concern of Western civilization, and should not be taken for granted during our present crisis. The artist's sensibility has threatened all tyrants from Augustus Caesar to Hitler and Stalin, and now Osama bin Laden. It is through writers such as Ovid that gifted students can gain an appreciation of freedom of expression in a democratic society. ★★★

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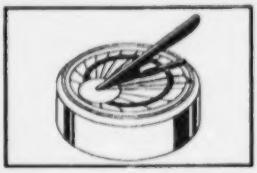

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Congratulations to Ken Siegelman on his being appointed Poet Laureate of Brooklyn, New York by the president of the borough of Brooklyn. Ken has written nine poetry books, one of which was published by Gifted Education Press in 1997 – **Learning Social Studies and History Through Poetry**. I wish Ken continued success. As a teacher for over thirty years in the New York City Public Schools, his poems reflect the problems of teaching in urban schools. Another book published by GEP, **Essential Mathematics for Gifted Students: Preparation for Alge-bra, Grades 4-8** by Frank Sganga, has been receiving considerable interest from school districts since it was published in early January 2002. This interest may presage shifting needs of educators away from educational models to more content-based concerns.

As I write this introduction during Black History Month, I am again reminded of one of the most pressing needs in gifted education – the identification and rigorous education of gifted minority children. Some of my observations regarding this issue are: (1) Early education programs should be established specifically for minority children who show intellectual potential; (2) admission should not be solely based upon standardized test results; (3) teacher and staff nominations should play a strong role in the identification process; (4) nonverbal ability tests such as the Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (1997) should be used in conjunction with more traditional instruments to assess these children; and (5) curriculum should focus on developing multiple intelligences.

Dr. Jerry Flack has an interesting article in this issue that shows how a multiple intelligences model can be used to teach gifted students about Abraham Lincoln's life and accomplishments. Clearly, his application of MI theory can be generalized to many other topics and subjects. We welcome Jane Mitchell of The Rock, Georgia who has written a wonderful article on teaching Shakespeare. She demonstrates creativity, drive, enthusiasm and rapport in teaching the Bard's plays to gifted children. Dr. Michael Walters concludes this issue with a discussion of the Black author, James McBride, who has written interesting books about his own life and the lives of Black soldiers in World War II.

**Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher**

"Would it be better to sit in silence?/ To think everything, to feel everything, to say nothing?/...../ But the nature of man is not the nature of silence./ Words are the thunders of the mind./ Words are the refinement of the flesh./ Words are the responses to the thousand curvaceous moments – / we just manage it – / sweet and electric, words flow from the brain/ and out the gate of the mouth." From **The Leaf and the Cloud**, pp. 11-12 (2000, Da Capo Press) by Mary Oliver.

## Abraham Lincoln: A Hero for the Ages Seen Through the Prism of Multiple Intelligences

**by Jerry Flack Denver, Colorado**

In an age of cynicism and disillusionment about political leaders, it is perhaps more crucial than ever that young people have heroic models to admire and emulate. Certainly, no American man shines more brilliantly than Abraham Lincoln, and it would be a tragedy if today's youth did not come to know this remarkable human being. In his superb biography of Lincoln, written specifically for youth, historian Albert Marrin notes that in the past fifty years, every poll of historians has ranked Abraham Lincoln as America's greatest president. Marrin argues that this fact is not because Lincoln was a perfect man. He made many mistakes and had many faults including self-doubt, prejudice, and hesitation. He cried openly in front of generals and cabinet members. But, Marrin points out, Lincoln also had the great gift, the capacity for growth. Lincoln rose above his humble beginnings, his own weaknesses and prejudices, always learning, always maturing as a leader. Marrin furthers his tribute to Lincoln by arguing that while George Washington (incidentally, Lincoln's greatest hero) is perceived as the father of our country, Lincoln must be seen to represent the unity and brotherhood of the American people. (Marrin, 1997, p. 8)

What more natural a subject to study than Abraham Lincoln. There is so very much that young people can learn from an examination of his life.

Sir Richard Livingstone wrote, "True education is the habitual vision of greatness." (Gibbon, 1993, p. 9) If we wish the young people of today to have visions of greatness, such images may be found in an examination of the life of the exceptional Abraham Lincoln.

### Lincoln Facts and Accomplishments

In addition to being judged the greatest president ever by historians, Lincoln is also esteemed to have been the greatest writer among all the presidents. This is a singular tribute to Lincoln's own genius, his profound respect for the power of words, and his thirst for learning, especially considering that if one puts all of Lincoln's formal schooling together, it represents roughly the equivalent of one year of formal education. With no paper or pencil available, and most likely no slate, the young Lincoln practiced writing by scratching letters with a rock on the backside of a shovel. Lincoln was mostly a self-taught linguistic genius.

In the domain of the interpersonal, Lincoln was a fascinating person He so abhorred killing that he gave away his hunting rifle after he killed a turkey as a boy, yet he presided over the deadliest war in American history. He was melancholy and wept openly at cabinet meetings when he was president. Some say that he even foretold his own death based on dreams he had shortly before the terrible, fateful night at Ford's Theater.

Lincoln possessed an indomitable spirit. He failed in business and lost far more elections than he ever won, yet he never ceased to persevere.

The Lincolns suffered terrible indignities. Lincoln actually had to go before Congress as President of the United States in the midst of the Civil War and swear that his wife was not a traitor to the Union for the Confederacy.

The Lincolns lost two of their four sons while they were still in childhood and the grief nearly destroyed each of them. One story, perhaps apocryphal, is that Lincoln's grief over his second lost son, William or "Willie" was so intense that he had the boy's body exhumed at least once so that he could look once more upon his son's face.

### A Lincoln Study

A study of Lincoln can begin at any age level and any curriculum model may be used to design such a study. In this article, stellar references about Lincoln are highlighted that cross all grade levels. Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory is the basis for organizing curriculum experiences. Although additional intelligences have been proposed by Dr. Gardner, the eight intelligences outlined in David Lazear's Eight Ways of Knowing (Skylight, 1999) are used herein. These intelligences are: verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, naturalist, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

### Multiple Intelligences and Abraham Lincoln

In a past issue of the ***Gifted Education Press Quarterly*** (Fall, 1998), I was fortunate to be able to share how I have used Multiple Intelligences theory and activities to teach elementary school teachers and students using the fairy tale Cinderella as the content base. It was truly a joy to talk with kindergarten and first grade students about how they would plan and build a mall exclusively for children to be called Cinderella City. In the recent years I have worked with more middle school and secondary teachers about the same Multiple Intelligences theory and activities, but I have accentuated more sophisticated content, specifically the courage and wisdom of Abraham Lincoln. It is those ideas I wish to share

here.

Because I described the Multiple Intelligences theory and teaching activities in the earlier article, I will only briefly touch on them here. Dr. Gardner's theories and works have become as famous as any concept in contemporary education and do not require yet another detailed explanation here. Therefore, I summarize his work below as I understand it. I should also mention that I am aware that Dr. Gardner has explored additional intelligences, but this is foremost an article about teaching strategies and I have found that classroom teachers perceive his first eight intelligences to be by far the most useful and practical elements to plan curriculum for their students.

## Multiple Intelligence Theory Definitions

***Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence*** refers to the knowledge, skills, and use of language in oral and written communications. Facility with language or linguistic intelligence involves phonology, syntax, and semantics; understanding and using the sound, order, and the meaning of words.

***Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence*** refers to the ability a person has to compose, perform, and appreciate music. The principle components of musical intelligence are pitch, rhythm, and timbre.

***Logical/Mathematical Intelligence*** is the ability to problem solve and "figure things out." Activities include mathematical operations utilizing numbers in problem solving, but can just as readily include scientific problem solving or invention wherein a person makes a startling analogy or intuitive leap and suddenly solves a problem or offers an explanation of natural phenomena previously unknown. The core intelligence is not necessarily verbal. History is replete with examples of mathematicians and other problem solvers who discovered or understood solutions to problems before they were able to eventually articulate their conclusions.

***Visual/Spatial Intelligence*** involves the capacity to orient one's self to spaces and to inhabit and navigate those spaces whether they be small spaces such as a classroom or the oceans of the world. Spatial intelligence involves more that visual perception as evidenced by the fact that blind persons can learn very well to navigate their world. There are first-rate blind sculptors. Artists and navigators are among people who use space, distance, and perception with particular skill.

***Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence*** allows people to utilize bodily movement to physically solve problems, create new products and perform with or without the use of tools. A fine surgeon exhibits bodily-kinesthetic skill as does a mime and a baseball pitcher. Tailors and construction workers also rely heavily on their bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

***Naturalist Intelligence*** allows people to survive in the natural world. Societies have always depended on those who can cultivate the land and make food grow, and those whose sensibilities allow them to use natural phenomenon to cure and heal. After survival, there are also those who find inspiration in nature such as the photographer Ansel Adams and the philosopher Henry David Thoreau. There are also scientists such as Rachel Carson who protect and preserve nature.

***Interpersonal Intelligence*** is the first of two personal intelligences Gardner cites. Interpersonal intelligence involves the ability of people to successfully interact with other human beings. Some individuals exhibit remarkable skill in their ability to read other person's needs, wishes, and intentions. Teachers, religious leaders and politicians are among the professionals who widely utilize interpersonal intelligence.

***Intrapersonal Intelligence*** refers to the internal knowledge people possess about themselves. This intelligence involves introspection and an understanding of one's feelings, behavior patterns, and reactions to the world and being able to use such self-knowledge to positive effect. People who recognize their tendency to procrastinate and thus create action plans to make sure they fulfill responsibilities are persons who effectively employ intrapersonal intelligence.

## Multiple Intelligences Activities

Activities and performances commonly associated with each of the multiple intelligences are listed below.

***Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence Activities***:
reading, writing poetry and prose, editing, formal speaking, journal keeping, storytelling, giving directions, learning foreign languages, appreciating verbal humor (e.g., puns)

***Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence Activities***:
singing, playing, improvising, composing, keeping time, humming, using percussion instruments, making rhythmic patterns, responding to music, learning and using Morse Code

***Logical/Mathematical Intelligence Activities***:
outlining and conducting science experiments, predicting outcomes, estimating, math calculating and problem solving, reasoning and debating, understanding analogies and abstractions, detecting and solving mysteries, deciphering or creating codes, solving brain teasers, playing chess

***Visual/Spatial Intelligence Activities***:
painting, drawing, imaging, composing photographs,

orienteering, building models, inventing, designing and building, inventing, mapping, creating diagrams. working with mazes and jigsaw puzzles

***Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence Activities***:
dancing, acting, skating, sculpting, sewing, crafting, playing sports, physically illustrating, pantomiming, practicing martial arts, tinkering with machines

***Naturalist Intelligence Activities***
observing nature, labeling and mounting specimens, collecting data, keeping logs, studying changes in the environment, gardening, farming, caring for animals, classifying natural objects, protecting wildlife

***Interpersonal Intelligence Activities***:
leading people, cooperating, mediating and solving disputes, teaching others, organizing, negotiating, empathizing, counseling, sharing, interviewing, collaborating, understanding others, brainstorming, volunteering, peer coaching and tutoring

***Intrapersonal Intelligence Activities***:
silently reflecting, keeping a diary or journal, daydreaming, understanding one's self, imagining future roles and opportunities, analyzing self behaviors, motives, and performances, goal setting, clarifying values, making personal choices, designing, implementing, and evaluating daily, weekly, monthly and life plans

## Abraham Lincoln Multiple Intelligences Activities

### *Verbal/Linguistic Intelligence*

***Read Walt Whitman's Lincoln tributes***.
***Study important authors*** of the time (Louisa May Alcott).
***Examine letters*** Lincoln wrote and received (see Grace Belden's letter urging Lincoln to grow a beard and the letter Lincoln wrote to Mrs. Bixby, a mother who lost five sons in the Civil War).
***Analyze Lincoln's eloquence*** with words found in such works as The Gettysburg Address.
***Read Lincoln's poetry*** that he wrote as a young man.
Seek, read, and analyze Lincoln's quotations and aphorisms.
Write and illustrate and ABC book about Lincoln.
***Explore the six-trait writing model trait of voice***. Then, read Lincoln's letters and speeches exclusively from the point of view of noting how he used voice in his writing.
***Alone or with others, perform a readers' theater presentation*** of either a collage of Lincoln's writings or tributes to Lincoln by such poets as Walt Whitman (e.g., "O Captain! My Captain!"). Write a concrete poem about Lincoln in the shape of his silhouette; then create a similar concrete poem about yourself.
***Memorize a memorable speech and present to class***. Write and deliver Lincoln's acceptance speech for his second term of office, or paraphrase one of his speeches. Pose as Lincoln's speech writer.
***Memorize and deliver a favorite Lincoln speech***.
***Read aloud*** a poem or letter Lincoln wrote.
***Read aloud*** Walt Whitman's poetic tributes to Lincoln, "O Captain, My Captain." and "When the Lilacs in the Dooryard Last Bloomed."
***Read passages*** from **Abe Lincoln Remembers** (2000) by Ann Turner. Pick a passage from Lincoln's life and model Turner's style. Write a first person account that Lincoln himself might have written.
***Study the lives and works of other authors*** of Lincoln's time such as Harriet Beecher Stowe (Uncle Tom's Cabin).
***Read Lincoln's poetry*** found in such works as Harold Holzer's **Abraham Lincoln, The Writer** (2000). How might his early writing of poetry impacted his later writings such as the Gettysburg Address? (Example: "Four score and seven years ago," is far more poetic than saying "87 years ago.")
***Examine a speech by Lincoln*** and paraphrase using today's language.
***Choose a topic about which you feel strongly*** and write a debate briefly outlining your views.

### *Musical/Rhythmic Intelligence*

***Listen to Aaron Copland's "Lincoln Portrait."***
***Listen to Civil War-related songs (e.g., "Dixie").***
***Read the story of how Lincoln*** requested the Union band to play "Dixie" at the war's end.
***Compose music*** as a tribute to Lincoln.
***Create a new, improved rhythm instrument*** using Lincoln pennies.
***Compose a rap song*** that recreates the chronology of the Civil War.
***Listen to songs that slaves sang***. Reflect upon how such songs may have helped slaves cope with their intolerable circumstances.

***Use a familiar tune (e.g., "Greensleaves") and create new lyrics*** that tell the life story of Lincoln.

***Drummer boys played a significant role in the Civil War. Read about the lives of these boys***. Study the "language" of various drum cadences and bugle cadences used in the Civil War. Are there different meanings to different rhythms and bugle calls, such as "retreat" and "charge ahead"?

***Find recorded examples of period music*** from the Civil War that might have been played at White House affairs the Lincolns hosted.

***Compose a message in Morse Code*** to be sent to the front dismissing McClellan from his command.

***Listen to tapes of authentic Civil War-era songs*** including "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Identify instruments of Lincoln's time. Sing or teach a song from this era.

***Create an original ballad about the life of Abraham Lincoln. Use an existing folk tune or create a new one.***

***Learn enough Morse Code*** to send a message about Lincoln's arrival in Washington, D. C., his assassination, etc.

### *Logical/Mathematical Intelligence*

***Learn the dimensions*** of the Lincoln Memorial.

***Study Lincoln-inspired architecture***, especially buildings carrying his name.

***Create story problems*** from Civil War and railroad extension statistics (e.g., miles of rail built before, during, immediately after the Civil War).

***Compute miles traveled*** by Lincoln in his lifetime.

***Determine the number*** of Civil War fatalities and casualties (greatest losses in nation's history).

***Use a Venn diagram to compare*** schools of Lincoln's youth with your school.

***Create a puzzle (e.g., cross-word, maze)*** using important facts from the life of Lincoln as clues.

***Create a Venn diagram comparing*** wildlife in Kentucky, Illinois, and the Virginia area to students' current land area.

***Make a graph*** of death tolls by battle, North and South.

***Create a blueprint***, complete with realistic measurements for Lincoln's boyhood cabin. Use a computer program for the creation of the blueprints.

***Develop a code*** that could have been used for communication by soldiers in the Civil War.

***Look about. Find as many things*** as possible that portray Lincoln's face (e.g., penny).

***Create original story problems*** based upon statistics from the Civil War (e.g., miles of rail track built before, during and immediately after the Civil War).

***Examine the number of votes Lincoln received*** in the presidential elections of 1860 and 1864. What percentage of the vote did he receive in each election? (Note: In 1860, Lincoln was elected president with the lowest percentage of the popular vote in the history of the nation. In 1864, he became the first president in more than 30 years to win re-election.)

***Compute the miles*** Lincoln traveled in his lifetime from his birth in Kentucky to his death in Washington, D. C.

***Investigate the staggering financial costs*** of the Civil War to both the North and the South.

***Determine the number*** of Civil War fatalities and casualties which represent the greatest losses in American military history.

***Study to become a Lincoln scholar***. Choose one aspect of Lincoln's life (e.g., his boyhood) and learn all you can about it. Choose a creative way to share your expertise.

### *Visual/Spatial Intelligence*

***Examine famous sculptures of Lincoln***; learn how Mt. Rushmore was sculpted.

***Draw exterior views and floor plans*** of Lincoln homes (log cabin, Springfield, IL home).

***Learn about the building the Lincoln Memorial*** (white marble from Marble, CO).

***Map Lincoln's life***; then map your own life thus far.

***Study portraits of Lincoln.***

***Create a portrait of Lincoln.***

***Photocopy photographs and words of Lincoln*** and create a Lincoln collage.

***Sculpt a likeness*** of the Lincoln Memorial and then create a drawing or sculpt a likeness of what you would want a memorial to you to look like.

***Create a portrait of Lincoln*** made entirely of Lincoln pennies.

***Build a "log" cabin*** from Lincoln pennies.

***Create a collage*** made up of Lincoln symbols: pennies, hat,

ax, Mississippi River boat, rocking chair).

***Identify one of the great battlefields*** of the Civil War and design a contemporary National Parks and Monuments brochure for it.

Create a new banknote. All images on the note should pertain to Lincoln and his life.

***Build a cabin*** with Lincoln Logs and list other creative uses for Lincoln Logs. Use Lincoln Logs to build a recreation of Lincoln's cabin. Build to scale using your own blueprints.

***Design costumes (one-dimensional)*** for Lincoln's family from construction paper....make paper dolls.

***Study Lincoln's hat***. Then design a new hat that would show your personality.

***Draw a map that charts Lincoln's train travels*** on the way from Springfield, Illinois to Washington, D.C.

***Examine famous sculptures of Lincoln*** such as Mt. Rushmore and Daniel Chester French's sculpture of Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial. How were they created? How long did it take the sculptors to complete their works? What problems did they have to overcome? See especially **The Statue of Abraham Lincoln: A Masterpiece** by Daniel Chester French. Minneapolis, MN: Lerner, 1997.

***Draw exterior and interior views*** of the Kentucky cabin in which Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809.

***Carve or mold a statue or bust of Lincoln***. A bar of soap, soft wood, clay, or any other medium is acceptable.

***Study the impact of photography*** on the Civil War. See especially the work of Mathew Brady.

***Draw a multiple intelligences profile*** (bar graph) of Abraham Lincoln. What intelligences did he possess in great abundance? What intelligences did he not have opportunities to develop?

***Map the route of Lincoln's funeral train***.

### *Bodily/Kinesthetic Intelligence*

***Improvise a family scene*** between Lincoln and his family.

***Present a speech*** as Lincoln might have delivered it.

***Stage an interpretive dance*** commemorating a moment from Lincoln's life.

***Create a human bar graph*** of Lincoln's MI Profile.

***Locate and read articles*** about actors who have portrayed Lincoln on stage and screen.

***Construct an exhibit*** for the classroom or school.

***On butcher paper, outline Lincoln's body***, especially his height, and compare to your own body; how much of the great man's shadow can you fit?

***Study the environmental challenges*** soldiers from both the North and the South faced. How did soldiers transport their equipment from place to place over rugged terrain and in bad weather while on the march? What were some of the hardships Confederate and Union soldiers suffered such as frostbite and diseases carried by insects?

***With the aid of a very skilled adult, practice orienteering and hiking*** through difficult and unfamiliar terrain.

***Create a tableau*** with characters from Lincoln's life to depict important occurrences. Have students use dance movements to go along with a song from the Civil War era.

***Draw Lincoln's image*** on a large sheet of butcher paper, complete with shoes and top hat, to his known measurements. Then students measure their height and compare to Lincoln's.

***Discover the games children played*** during the 1800s. Develop instructions and play one or more games.

***With professional adult supervision, locate a (dead) tree*** that can safely be chopped down and split into logs and rails.

***As a class, choreograph in chronological order*** a mime presentation of the salient events in Lincoln's life. Note that this also involves the logical sequencing of Lincoln's life.

***Create a quilt square*** about some aspect of Lincoln's life and words.

***Act out a scene from Lincoln's life***. It can be a dramatic event such as the delivery of the "Gettysburg Address," but it can also be a playful family scene with Lincoln playing with his sons Willie and Tad.

***Improvise a scene*** between Lincoln and his family.

***Re-stage a portion of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates***.

***Design and construct a Lincoln tribute*** or Lincoln museum in the classroom.

***Explore the Internet*** to find pictures and information about actors who have portrayed Lincoln in movies and on the stage.

### *Naturalist Intelligence*

***Investigate the diets of Civil War soldiers***. How and on what did they survive?

***Identify plants and animals*** indigenous to the lands of Lincoln's youth.

***Note the references and comparisons of Lincoln*** to the natural world in the words of poets such as Walt Whitman What natural medicines were employed by doctors and nurses in the Civil War?

***Lincoln did not like to hunt or kill wild animals. Stage a debate*** (as with the Lincoln-Douglas Debates) between those advocating hunting and those opposed. What are the pros and cons of hunting today? What were they in Lincoln's time?

***Identify recipes and prepare some of the foods*** that may have been eaten by Lincoln on the Illinois frontier.

***Identify the natural materials, species and number of trees***, that would have gone into building a log cabin in Lincoln's boyhood days. What impact would the construction of such cabins have had on the natural environment?

***What animals*** (e.g., bears, mountain lions, buffalo) lived in the great wildernesses of Lincoln's youth? Do any of these species still inhabit the regions of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois?

***Plan and prepare a simple meal*** to be cooked over a wood fire. With adult supervision and in a safe place, cook the meal and eat it. Was the preparation of food easy in Lincoln's boyhood years?

***Identify and create an herbarium of plants*** used for medication during the Civil War.

***Identify and compare the natural medicines and resources*** that would have been used by a Native American family in North American in the 1500s, by the Lincoln family in the 1800s, and by your family in the year 2002 or beyond. How would lives of each different family be impacted by the natural environment?

***Read some of Lincoln's writings***, especially his early poems, about his early life. Draw a natural scene where you imagine he might be happiest as a boy. What plants and animals could be in the picture?

***Create an entry for the Farmer's Almanac*** for some period during Lincoln's life.

***Examine wood cutting, wood burning*** and related environmental issues: lack of trees, air pollution.

***Invite a forestry expert to class***; study the different kinds of forest.

***Study gardens of the 1800s*** and draw a blueprint for the garden for Lincoln's Springfield, Illinois home or the White House.

What plants and animals were indigenous to the lands of Lincoln's youth? (Which are extinct or at least no longer present in his homeland?)

***Note how poets such as Walt Whitman often use references and comparisons*** to the natural world in their tributes to Lincoln (e.g., lilacs, the great star Venus, shooting stars). See "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd."

### *Interpersonal Intelligence*

***Seek and read evidence of Lincoln's faith***, his belief in God.

***Debate with others concerning Lincoln's greatness*** (e.g., Was Lincoln greater than Washington and/or Jefferson?).

***Was Lincoln justified in suspending many First Amendment rights during the Civil War?***

***Prepare and deliver an Oprah or Rosie O'Donnell type of interview*** with the Lincoln Cabinet.

***Compare the leadership characteristics*** of Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln.

***Consider the impact the Civil War had on families***. All of Mary Todd Lincoln's brothers and brothers-in-law fought for the Confederacy. Mrs. Lincoln herself was considered by many to be a spy.

***Discuss with others the causes of the Civil War***.

***Discuss with others Lincoln's greatness***. Does he deserve to be named the greatest president?

***Pretend one person is Lincoln and the other is Douglas***. Debate issues they would have debated. You are a reporter scheduled to interview Lincoln today, April 14, 1865. Prepare the questions you want to ask him.

***Appoint North and South representatives to debate*** a war issue or an issue that the students care about in their time frame. Can they reach a compromise?

***Offer courting advice to Mary Todd*** via an Advice Column.

***Conduct a debate*** as Lincoln and Douglas may have experienced it: issues of slavery. Examine contemporary issues that have some of the same divisiveness.

***Assume the role of a modern TV talk show host*** and comment on the Lincolns as parent role models. Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln spoiled their children shamelessly,

according to contemporaries. Willie and Tad Lincoln were the first presidential children to actually live and grow up in the White House. They enjoyed wild rides through the halls of the White House in a cart pulled by a pet goat.

***Class discussion: What if the South had won the Civil War? What would life be like today?***

### *Intrapersonal Intelligence*

***What do I most admire about Lincoln?***

***Note the incredible number of failures in Lincoln's life.*** How does one cope with such heavy personal losses?

***Imagine a letter Mary Todd Lincoln might have written*** from 1861-65 to her family, most of whom fought for the Confederacy, about the Civil War.

***How did Robert E. Lee feel about being offered commands*** in both the Union and Confederate Armies? Write his thoughts in a diary entry.

***Write an epitaph that Robert Lincoln***, the president's eldest son, might have penned privately on the morning of his father's death.

***Write an epitaph Lincoln might have written*** a few days prior to his death as he anticipated that fateful event.

***Write a eulogy for Lincoln*** from the point-of-view of an ex-slave or a Union soldier.

***You are President Lincoln***. You know a reporter will interview you today. ***Write in your journal, in preparation, an evaluation*** of your achievements, your relationships, your failures, as well as your plans for the future. Write out excerpts from Lincoln's diary entries that respond to his many failures.

***Lincoln was physically different from others***. What makes you stand out from the crowd? How do you feel about your difference?

***Write a journal entry*** as Lincoln might have written it himself at some critical juncture in his life.

***Write a journal entry*** that one of Lincoln's young sons might have written during their lives in the White House.

***Consider Lincoln's introspection and depression***. Did these traits help or hinder his conduct of the war?

## Lincoln Books

There is no shortage of fine Lincoln books for students of all ages and ability/readiness levels. Only two figures have more books about them registered in the Library of Congress than Lincoln, Jesus Christ and Shakespeare. The following are especially relevant and time works on Lincoln. Many fine books speak to at least one particular intelligence to be found in Lincoln's life. The vast majority of Lincoln books celebrate his interpersonal skills of great leadership, while others honor his great writing skill. More recently, Raymond Bial has singled out his naturalist skill in the book, **Where Lincoln Walked** (1997).

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## Lincoln's Words

Lincoln made the following remark to a young law student: "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed, is more important than any other one thing." (Freedman, 1987, p. 134) If teachers want gifted youths to succeed, they must provide models of greatness. It is difficult to imagine a greater example of a successful gifted man than Abraham Lincoln. When one adds into the equation the humble beginnings and misfortunes of life that Lincoln suffered, his importance as a role model becomes ever greater. Lincoln is perhaps the greatest American ever and a particular approach to a study of his life may be found in the Multiple Intelligences way.

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## Abraham Lincoln - Quotations

"I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts."

"What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, the guns of our war steamers, or the strength of our gallant and disciplined army. . . .Our reliance is in the *love of liberty* which God has implanted in us. . . .Destroy this spirit, and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors. . . ."

"In times like the present, men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and eternity."

"No man is good enough to govern another man without that other man's consent."

"It has ever been my experience that folks who have no vices have very few virtues."

"Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

"I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice, and have received a great deal of kindness not quite free from ridicule."

## Shakespeare Sampler: A Unit to Connect Elementary Gifted Students to Shakespeare

**by Jane P. Mitchell The Rock, Georgia**

While my first experience in teaching Shakespeare to my gifted fifth graders at our Georgia elementary school was not a failure, it was also not the learning experience for my students that I had envisioned. After the unit had ended, I reflected upon my teaching and what I needed to do the next time I taught "Shakespeare Sampler," a unit so named because it represents a "sampling" of Shakespeare to introduce young students to the Bard. As a former junior high and high school teacher, I believe wholly in exposing younger students to Shakespeare, for "Usually, even by the time students are in junior high, they have come to feel that Shakespeare is 'hard' and that they have to endure it like bad-tasting medicine that's good for them." (Wood, 1997, 457-458) I wanted my students to feel the same enthusiasm I have for Shakespeare's stories and to marvel as I do how a good plot can live forever. What I realized was that in teaching Shakespeare for the first time to younger students was that I had not made enough connections to things my students already knew. I had not sufficiently dealt with the difficulty of the language, and I focused too much on the details of plot rather than the broad aspects of theme. But when my next group of fifth graders asked about the life-sized poster of William Shakespeare, I was ready to say, "Let me introduce you!"

The first connection that I made with this group of students was one of historical perspective. I read the book, Bard of Avon: The Story of William Shakespeare (1992) by Diane Stanley and Peter Vennema to my students. As I read, I stopped occasionally to pose questions. The first was, "Where is England and what do you know about this country?"

My students were able to tell me its location and the fact that English citizens colonized our original thirteen colonies. Then I inquired about Queen Elizabeth. Through discussion, students connected her as England's ruler during the "Age of Exploration." Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Francis Drake were explorers they had studied, they told me, and I could see that they were now viewing William Shakespeare as a contemporary of these historical figures. As I continued to read aloud, students learned that Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 and that James of Scotland became king. Again I stopped. "What do you know about King James?" I asked. Finally, a student said, "Wasn't he the one the Jamestown, Virginia settlement was named for?" Another connection was made. Students were able to grasp that at the time of Shakespeare, our own country had not been formed but was being rapidly claimed by several countries through colonization. I asked students to visualize William Shakespeare hearing news about the Jamestown settlement. "Would he want to write about the New World in one of his plays?" I asked. Students discussed the question and decided that maybe it was possible that American history could have inspired Shakespeare. I would save *that* connection for later in the unit, for now it was time to address the language of Shakespeare's plays.

King James proved to be a helpful connection to introducing the language of Shakespeare. "What else do you know about King James?" I asked.
The students were puzzled at first, until one said, "Well, there's the King James Bible."
"Great!" I answered. "Tell me about it."

The students knew much more than they realized as they began to relay the fact that King James authorized the writing of this Bible. They told me about its language, the usage of "thee" and "thou," that our language had changed over the years, and that people of King James's *and* Shakespeare's time must have spoken English in the manner it was written in this version of the Bible.

Now it was time for some fun. I gave each student a handout that I had compiled directly from the vocabulary and grammar sections of the website "Welcome to the Renaissance Faire," (http://www.renfaire.com/index.html). Together we read aloud the list of words and phrases. Then the students used this handout as they conversed with a partner. I asked if students had ever heard of the play, "Romeo and Juliet." All hands went up. I explained that the original story of "Romeo and Juliet" was actually a very old one, around long before Shakespeare himself, and that Shakespeare based this play on this older story. (Bevington, 1989, 991). Then I asked students about two tales with which they were familiar and that had been around for a long time: "The Three Little Pigs" and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears." I divided the students into two groups, one for each fairy tale, with these directions: Rewrite and present the story as a play using "Shakespeare's English." The results were hilarious.

My room turned into a stage. Desks became the houses for the three little pigs. Stacked books became a chimney. Construction paper "plates" became the containers for make-believe porridge, and chairs pulled together made the beds for the bears. Students rummaged through a box of old clothes to find aprons, shawls, and hats. It was show time with the following lines:

"Good e'en, thou most industrious little pig!"
"Wherefore hath all *my* porridge been eaten?"

"Nay, thou most horrible wolf, ye shall not come in!"
"Aroint, Goldilocks! Thou hath invaded our home!"

And as the Big Bad Wolf entered the "chimney," all the actors in "The Three Little Pigs" called out, "Fare-thee-well, thou most wicked wolf!"

Students now had connected Shakespeare to the history they had studied and to literature they knew and loved. It was time now to introduce a sampling of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare's plays have much appeal for younger students. As Dr. Albert Cullum states:

"Shakespeare has lived through the centuries not only because of his lyrical and his exciting narratives, but also because he clearly defines the good and evil of his characters and situations. Shakespeare never clouds his viewpoints nor obscures his opinions. Right is always triumphant and evil is always destroyed." (1995, p.4)

In addition, ". . .the stories are wonderful -- rich, good tales that anyone can understand at some level -- and understanding increases with exposure." (Wood, p. 456)

The first play that students read was *Julius Caesar*. I chose to use the abridged play from Dr. Albert Cullum's Shakespeare in the Classroom: Plays for the Intermediate Grades. After reading the play, students discussed the themes of friendship, loyalty, and patriotism -- topics relevant to both the play and to their lives. Brutus, they maintained, was especially believable, because of his inner conflict. They related Caesar's growing popularity to modern politics in which popularity polls are reported frequently. And, through Cassius they recognized their own tendencies to be influenced occasionally by those who want to "make trouble."

*Julius Caesar* was an excellent play to connect our previous study of principles of public speaking. We discussed how voice inflection, rate, and projection can change the audience's perception of the character. And, we discussed how, in any speech, the audience plays a role, as well. I divided the class into three groups: one group performed the beginning street scene with the soothsayer; another did Brutus's speech and his audience; and the third group performed Antony's speech with the audience. In each, we discussed how the characters conveyed caution, loyalty, self-defense, and challenge, not only through their words but also by their voices.

The next play the students read from Cullum's book was *The Tempest*. In addition to its entertaining, magical story, I chose this play to read because of its many themes and its connection to American history. "Profoundly influenced by European and Native American encounters in the New World, the play's themes include colonialism, slavery, racism, indentured servitude, the domination of women, native resistance, social rebellion, and political utopia." (Carey-Webb, 1993, p.30). Through these themes, students immediately recognized my earlier question in which I asked if Shakespeare could have been influenced by things he heard about English colonization in the Americas. They became further engrossed with history when I told them of the letter written by colonist William Stratchey who recorded a hurricane off the coast of Bermuda. (Carey-Webb, p.31) Once again, Shakespeare and his world were brought a little closer to my students' frame of reference.

The final play that I introduced was *Hamlet*. This time, instead of the students reading the play, I read a narrative version. Other narrative children's books of Shakespeare's plays are available, but mine happens to be an old copy of E. Nesbit's The Children's Shakespeare (1938) that I obtained from an used book sale. The plot, at first, was more complicated to students than the other two plays, and it was not as easy for them to determine if Hamlet was a true protagonist. It was time for another connection. Most of the students had seen the movie The Lion King (Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, dirs., 1994). I told students that they were going to watch a video of The Lion King and that they needed to record any similarities between the movie and *Hamlet*. Occasionally, I paused the video so students could discuss their observations, for they quickly saw that "Hamlet and Simba, the lion cub, are banished from their homes, face life threatening dangers, survive, and come back home to revenge the death of their fathers." (Gavin, 1996, p.55). After the video, we further discussed the similarities between Simba and Hamlet, and though Hamlet's life ended tragically, students agreed that Hamlet had "accepted his responsibility and done his duty to his father, his country, and himself." ( p. 57) The connection this time was not an historical one but one of modern culture -- an animated movie.

In addition to these plays, students were exposed to other Shakespeare activities during the unit. First, I did want them to experience Shakespeare's text, so I made copies of Polonius's advice to Laertes from *Hamlet*. This speech was relatively easy for students to understand because of its many phrases that have since become proverbs. I also read to students Shakespeare's London: A Guide to Elizabethan London by Julie Ferris. This entertaining "travel guide" gave students a sense of what life was like in Shakespeare's England. Other books, such as Stewart Ross's Shakespeare and Macbeth: The Story Behind the Play, were available for students to read independently. And, at my student's request, I read the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, the play whose name they were most familiar.

Near the end of the unit I distributed copies of Shakespeare's 29th sonnet. After students read the poem they discussed its

meaning and its rhyme scheme. Then I read to my students a quote by poet and author Maya Angelou:

"I remember I must have been about 12 and I read the sonnet -- I think it was the 29th of Shakespeare. And he could have been a little black girl in the South for me . . .Now he wrote that in the 16th Century, a white man in England. But he told the absolute truth about a black girl in Arkansas in the '40's." (Terry, 1993, p. M3)

Students were familiar with Angelou as the author of President Clinton's Inaugural Poem. Some said they had seen her on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Now they pondered that Shakespeare had also touched this renowned and popular figure in American literature. Another connection had been made.

Before the unit had ended, I wanted students to consider the authorship issue. I reread to students an excerpt of Bard of Avon: The Story of William Shakespeare, which I had used to introduce the unit:

"Over the years, there have been people who could not believe that the son of a glove maker, a small-town boy with only a grammar-school education, could have written the greatest series of plays in the English language." (Stanley and Vennema, 1992)

I went on to tell them more about the authorship issue, and then I asked them to discuss the possibility that someone else might have written the plays attributed to Shakespeare. To my surprise, they found the whole issue preposterous. For these gifted students from a small, rural town, hearing that anyone doubted the abilities of the real William Shakespeare would be the same as someone doubting that they, also from a small town, could be successful in an endeavor that they chose. William Shakespeare was now an author that they claimed for themselves.

According to Peggy O'Brian, "As teachers our job is to help students make connections -- between themselves and a piece of literature, between a piece of literature and the ideas it embodies, between the world of the piece and the student's world, connections *within* a piece of literature." (1993, p. 42) During this unit of "Shakespeare Sampler," students made connections -- to history they had been exposed to, to beloved fairy tales, to universal themes, to a popular movie, and to a poet with whom they had seen on television -- and, as a result, they made a personal connection to William Shakespeare. To these young students, Shakespeare was *most marvelous*!

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## Black History and Giftedness

**by Michael E. Walters**

**Center for Study of the Humanities in the Schools**

Black History Month is always a good opportunity for teachers to become aware and appreciate the role that sensibility has upon the development of the gifted individual. The success of any Black American is obviously the result of a personality enriched with the attributes of sensibility. Even with a gene for giftedness, there are many obstacles that every Black American has to overcome due to the enduring prejudices that unfortunately are a part of the American landscape. The problems of racial bias are evident. Yet especially on a psychological level, they still exist like an ongoing plague. One of the major features of the United States is that the attributes of sensibility contribute to people's achievement despite economic, ethnic and racial barriers. The writer, James McBride, is an example of how sensibility and giftedness can help individuals to become successful in the United States. His first book, **The Color of Water** (1996), has become a modern classic and is now used in many high school and college courses. The subtitle of his book is significant – **A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother**. His mother was from a Polish Jewish background. She was married to a Black minister and had twelve children. All of them became successful in such fields as medicine, music and education. This was despite the family's abject poverty and living in low-income public housing in Brooklyn, New York. Ruth McBride was not only a mother but a role model; she emphasized the twin pillars of religious devotion and respect for education. At sixty-five years she received a degree in social work from Temple University.

McBride has recently published a new book in February 2002 entitled, **Miracle at St. Anna** (2002). This novel is based upon the historical experiences of the noteworthy Buffalo Soldiers (92nd division) in Italy during World War II. Besides describing the heroic struggles of these soldiers, it is about identifying with the oppressive conditions of Italian citizens during this war.

Gifted students and their teachers will find these two books by James McBride not only esthetically enjoyable, but insightful concerning how sensibility allows the gifted to achieve success despite overwhelming obstacles. At the end of **The Color of Water**, McBride returns to his mother's hometown of Suffolk, Virginia to locate his Jewish roots. He meets a childhood friend of his mother who sent her a taped message:

"Ruth, this is Aubrey Rubenstein. I don't know if you remember me or not, but if you do, I'm glad to meet your son and I see you've accomplished a great deal in your life. . . ." (p. 228).

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While reading a book that discusses the rationale for publishing the Great Books of the Western World (**The Great Conversation: A Reader's Guide to the Great Books of the Western World**, 1993, Mortimer Adler, Editor), I was impressed with the essayists' emphasis on the study of the humanities. Robert M. Hutchins, Clifton Fadiman and Mortimer Adler emphasized the importance of basing education on a core curriculum devoted to the study of literature, philosophy, ethics, language, history and great scientific works. Their model for a liberal education influenced many universities, as well as high schools and community colleges, to offer such a core curriculum during the 1940's and 1950's. Unfortunately, this rational approach to American secondary and higher education declined during the 1960's and subsequent decades. Today, the sciences and mathematics have become the major concern of public schools and universities

This trend has also occurred in the books published by Gifted Education Press. During a period of about 15 years from 1980-95, there was a great interest among educators of the gifted in the numerous humanities books published by GEP. Currently, they are primarily interested in our mathematics and science publications. This movement away from the humanities appears to be a national trend goaded by the current over-emphasis on high-stakes testing. A necessary goal should be to swing the curriculum pendulum toward a middle ground involving the study of the humanities in conjunction with mathematics and the sciences.

I believe the work of all three authors who have written essays for this issue of ***Gifted Education Press Quarterly*** can help to achieve this curriculum balance. Joan Smutny is a strong advocate for gifted education who stresses the importance of teaching the humanities to gifted children. My wife and I were privileged to hear her inspiring presentation at the annual Pennsylvania Association for Gifted Education Conference in April 2002. Lisa Rivero is one of the finest writers in the home schooling field. We are honored to present an essay adapted from her latest book, **Creative Home Schooling for Gifted Children: A Resource Guide** (Great Potential Press, 2002). GEP has also published a wonderful book by her, **Gifted Education Comes Home: A Case for Self-Directed Homeschooling** (2000). Michael Walters has a profound and ongoing interest in developing humanities programs for the gifted as demonstrated by his many essays published in ***GEPQ*** and in ***Gifted Education News-Page***. His current essay discusses the life and writings of John Steinbeck on the centennial of his birth.

Have a wonderful summer reading the Great Books of the Western World!

**Maurice D. Fisher, Publisher**

# STAND UP FOR GIFTED CHILDREN: ADVOCACY IN THE SCHOOL AND HOME

**by Joan Franklin Smutny National Louis University Evanston, Illinois**

Gifted children are still not receiving the education they need in our nation's public schools. Certainly the field of gifted education has progressed along many fronts (e.g., more comprehensive methods of identification; a greater recognition of the needs of under represented gifted populations; instructional strategies for teaching gifted students in the regular classroom, etc.). Yet, not all of this advancement has trickled down to the schools that directly affect the lives of students with the greatest potential. Funding for gifted education continues to be a challenge as resources vary from state to state. This means that our most promising students face shrinking resources with which to develop their talents and in economically depressed areas, the gifted have little chance of discovering their potential.

I mention these facts not to paint a dim picture of our educational system, but to point to the great need for both parents and teachers to adopt a strong advocacy role on behalf of gifted children everywhere. With school districts able to devote only a minimum of support, teachers and parents are the only advocates a child has to develop his abilities. In order for this advocacy to result in real benefits for the child, both teachers and parents need to form strong and lasting partnerships.

## Communication between Parents and Teachers

Sometimes, communication between a parent and teacher breaks down because of the initial stereotypes or assumptions each has of the other. Teachers tend to regard parents as potential accusers, as people who spend all day focusing on their children, who have no understanding of the responsibilities and pressures that classroom teachers have to juggle every day. As one teacher put it, "When I see a parent in the hall, I think, 'Oh-oh, what is it this time?' It just seems wrong for parents to expect so much from me when I have 30 kids to worry about, not one or two!"

Parents also have their pre-conceptions about teachers. They assume that teachers will brush them off if they try to talk about their child's problem in school. Parents of gifted children feel especially nervous about bringing up the subject of their child's exceptional ability. As one mother said, "I definitely get the feeling teachers don't like the 'g' word in this school. I could almost see my son's teacher think, 'Oh no, here's another doting mother who thinks her little Jimmy is gifted.' I have to screw up my courage just to go in there and ask for an appointment!"

While there are both parents and teachers who have made communication and collaboration difficult, this should not discourage true advocates for continuing to take a stand for gifted children. I have seen both parents and teachers create substantive changes through their persistence, ingenuity, integrity, and an ability to communicate effectively. What follows is a guide, based on my actual experience with both parents and teachers:

## For the Parent

- Expect the teacher to be reasonable, no matter what you've heard from other parents or your child. Even teachers unsympathetic to gifted students respond better to parents who approach them positively than to those who are already on the defensive.
- Start by thanking the teacher for giving you time to talk about your child. Teachers have never been more burdened with extra responsibilities than now. Any expression of appreciation at the outset will help your cause.
- Always begin your communications with the teacher. While relationships can always be patched up later, it's best to avoid even the appearance of going behind a teacher's back. Only if the teacher proves unwilling to help in any way should you turn to the principal or someone other than the teacher.
- Get straight to the point. State the reason why you felt it necessary to meet with the teacher and say it in a diplomatic way. For example, instead of saying, "My son is really bored in your math class" try this: "My son already knows this material in math and since he really loves this subject, I wondered if we could discuss other options for him in math."
- Listen carefully to what the teacher says. His objections to certain requests aren't necessarily rejections. Keep pressing for other options and have some ideas of your own. If he says, for example, "I have no time to create a separate set of activities for your child," offer to work as a partner. If he argues that your child has been inattentive, sloppy in her work, or misbehaving, don't automatically interpret this as a criticism. Say something like, "I'm sorry if she's not been following rules and I'm happy to work with her on that. But could you also allow her to spend more time doing some independent projects when she's finished her work?"
- Work for a consensus. Your goal is to find a solution for your child. Try to find some common ground. Be flexible in areas where you can be flexible, but firm on the points that really matter. If your child is working at a third of his capacity, it is unjust for him to sit in his seat day after day

learning almost nothing. But you might be able to be flexible in negotiating *how* changes are made. For example, the teacher may not be able or willing to offer an alternative curriculum, but may be able to talk to the principal and other teachers about letting your child attend a higher grade in some subjects.

- Have a time line for follow-up steps. Without some agreement about *when* certain things will happen, chances are, they won't happen. If the teacher says she'll talk an issue over with a principal, a curriculum coordinator, or anyone else, ask for a time when this will be done. You should also provide deadlines for your promises as well.
- Follow up on whatever promises or agreements you have made and stay in touch with the teacher on his or her promises.

**For the Teacher**

- Agree to meet with the parent at a time when you feel the least pressured (e.g., end of the week). If you squeeze the parent in when you are already feeling burdened, he or she will automatically be another burden to you.
- Be aware of your own attitude about gifted students. Do you think too much is made of them? That they have no real needs? Do you think all parents think their kids are gifted? Be aware of these biases and how they may influence your response.
- Be sensitive to the parent's concerns. Helping the parent will enable you to help not only this child, but other gifted students in your room. Parents of gifted children only want what every other parent wants—for their children to learn at the level of their ability. If you dismiss their concerns outright, they will think you are turning a blind eye to a real problem and this will only increase misunderstanding.
- Before meeting with the parent, review your own observations of the child's performance, including tests, class assignments, and any insights from your daily interactions.
- Make some notes to yourself on what you need as a teacher in order to help a gifted child. What are your time and resource constraints? Do not feel that you have to do all the work. Examine areas where you can do more and areas where you need assistance.
- Focus on the needs of the child. If you're a teacher who is advocating for a gifted child in a case where parents are unaware of their child's talents and uninformed about giftedness, discuss the special needs of gifted children in an assuring way. Suggest resources for them to learn more about it.
- Explore what can be done to provide more challenge and support for the gifted child with the idea of creating a partnership with the parent. Teachers are used to assuming a great deal of responsibility and this sometimes makes them feel resentful of anyone who asks for extra help. You can avoid this by suggesting ways that parents can help as well. If their child needs more advanced work in math and science, for example, what are parents willing to do to help the teacher structure this (e.g., through contract learning where parents can monitor the child's progress at home and help keep track of weekly assignments, etc.). Would they be willing to work with a small group of gifted students in content areas where they have expertise?
- Do not promise more than you can deliver. Clearly communicate the demands on your time and the resources you have and work from there. Show the parent that you are willing to do all you can for the benefit of the child, but that the constraints on your time and resources demand that they also take an active role in the process.
- Be open to the possibility of gifted children in your classroom. Many teachers have discovered that gifted students can be a wonderful resource in their classrooms (e.g., as resident experts in certain areas, as catalysts for creative activities in the curriculum).

After a parent-teacher conference has concluded, the question is: Did it accomplish anything? How do I know if it was successful? Here is a useful list of criteria for determining how well the meeting went (adapted from Smutny 2001, pg. 109):

- the child was the main focus, not the opinions or agenda of parent or teacher
- both parent and teacher listened to each other and considered each other's point of view
- the parent and the teacher negotiated for solutions that would meet the student's needs without disregarding the teacher's other classroom responsibilities or the parent's knowledge about his or her child
- both parent and teacher came to an understanding on how to proceed even if they had different opinions
- both agreed to work on a solution that would help the child and to continue working together
- both made commitments and scheduled actions.

In discussions, parents and teachers should explore as many possibilities as may help the child. Would the school consider test results from sessions the child had with an independent psychologist who specializes in gifted children? Can the child be placed in a higher grade for certain subjects where she has special abilities? Could she spend a morning or day at home once a week to work on projects that interest her? If the teacher, for whatever reason, cannot provide more advanced content in certain subjects, could the child have a mentor who would work with her after she had completed or tested out of subject matter she already knows? Would the parent be willing to mentor a small group of gifted students in some subjects? Could the parent and teacher plan an in-service session at the school to raise awareness of gifted students in the school and to learn new strategies for teaching gifted students in

the regular classroom?

Both parents and teachers can be resources in this process. One of the most effective partnerships I witnessed had an uncertain beginning. The parent felt the teacher didn't care about her child and the teacher felt the parent had unrealistic expectations about what she should be doing for the child. The relationship gradually changed when both focused on the needs of the student and what each could realistically accomplish to give the child the education he needed. The parent shared evidence of his work at home—books he'd read, art and science projects, and stories he wrote. The teacher discussed areas of the curriculum where she thought they could make changes. As the year progressed, the parent got involved in assisting the teacher on certain days and was a partner in designing and monitoring alternative assignments and projects for her gifted son.

**Effective Teacher-Parent Partnerships**

Teachers often express surprise when I tell them that, according to research, parents are the most accurate judges of their children's ability day one through age seven or eight. Consulting with them enables teachers to make a real difference for the gifted students in their classrooms. What do they enjoy doing at home? What strengths do their parents see in the home and neighborhood—intellectual, artistic, athletic, leadership? Recognizing that families have a mine of information about their children, teachers can create comprehensive learning profiles at the beginning of the year as a guide to intervention. This can be particularly helpful for students from culturally different families who may not realize their special gifts. Partnerships that become well established usually involve the following:

- regular communication with parents (via letters, phone calls, face-to-face meetings, etc.) regarding child's abilities, challenges, preferred learning styles, interests
- regular information-sharing on the subject of giftedness and what parents can do to further support their child's growth
- a system for two-way reporting between parents and teachers on the child's progress, changing educational needs, etc.
- involvement of parents in classroom activities—as aides in group work, specialists in certain areas of curriculum, bilingual/multicultural counselors
- collaboration between teacher and parents in monitoring progress on independent projects, alternative class work (this could take the form of independent study contracts, outlines of activities that challenge the child's abilities and talents).

My experience with gifted children of all backgrounds has proved the importance of creativity in the regular curriculum (see Smutny, Walker & Meckstroth 1997: 57-120). Teachers can integrate creative activities quite easily into most content areas and meet the needs of all students in the class simultaneously. Because creative assignments have no ceiling on learning, the gifted can advance to sophisticated levels without requiring additional planning from the teacher. In addition, creativity is a great equalizer. For culturally different gifted students, it provides a language for them to express their strengths. Examples are as follows:

- In history, children choose a conflict, issue, or problem raised by a text and stage a debate, with different students assuming the role of specific historic figures.
- In a language arts class, children write and dramatize stories and compose short free verse poems in response to art and music
- In a math class, students explore how artists estimate distances and heights in their work. They test their perceptions by putting a six-inch stick into the ground, measuring the length of the shadow, and then the length of the shadow of a nearby tree. How would the students calculate the height of the tree? The children devise their own system for figuring this out. They can diagram, use paintings, photographs, etc.

For gifted students, the arts provide new media in which to perceive, sense, analyze, and solve problems in all subject areas. A first-grade teacher in an urban, multicultural district once told me that her gifted students discovered new math problems by creating their own money system, imagining mathematical (often humorous) scenarios, and then acting them out. One child never had enough money for what he wanted to "buy" and so asked the clerk to put it on his tab. The gifted students enjoyed the process of figuring out the balance of this child's tab which involved calculating the price of goods he wanted to buy, plus the amount he owed on his tab, minus the money he brought with him to the store. This process helps creative young children to discover new concepts they might never encounter in traditional math class.

Gifted students need this kind of creative nurturance at home as well as in the school. Strong partnerships between teachers and parents can make it possible. I have known several teachers who directly involved parents in the creative work their children were doing in the classroom. The following are examples from real classrooms:

- A kindergarten teacher gave each student a picture and asked the parents to spend a little time with their child looking at the picture and imagining: What happened just before this picture? What happened after? The parents wrote down what their child said. In class the next day, each child showed their picture and talked about the story

they made up around it.

- A fourth grade teacher asked parents to help their children generate interesting questions for interviews of family members and relatives in order to write an oral history about a particular event, geographical area, etc. Parents also support their children in producing art work, photographs, collages, or any other related project.
- A third grade teacher requested parents to help their children create a small-scale illustration of their neighborhoods. Using rulers, a stick (at least 8 inches long), pencil and examples of other maps, parents helped their children figure out compass points (north, south, east, west) and choose a scale (e.g., one inch for each block). In school, they continued to work—creating symbols for landmarks such as homes, bridges, railroads, and churches —and drew and labeled streets.

These are some examples of how teachers can involve parents in their gifted child's education. Few parents understand how vital their role is until they experience it. A Haitian parent in one of my programs once said that she always felt that she "should just leave education to the experts." In the program, however, her second-grade son told her that he had to write a short description of himself as an object and he wanted her to read it and guess what the object was. The mother reported: "It was like a game for us, and I realized that I was missing something by not paying attention to my son's work. He wrote a funny description—really witty! Since that time, I always touch base with what he's doing in school and I've gotten more involved in his regular school." By encouraging parents to participate in the education of their children and to share their concerns and insights, teachers will accomplish far more for these promising students than they could ever do alone.

## A Final Note

Despite growing recognition of the importance of intervention, most gifted children in our country attend schools that have modest funds for gifted education or the knowledge and expertise to develop their talents. At present, therefore, the responsibility must fall on teachers and parents to become advocates for gifted children and develop ways to meet their special learning needs.

Teacher-parent partnerships are essential to prevent the loss of talent among this neglected talent pool. Networking as a team enables both teachers and parents to become more effective advocates and to develop alternative educational programs suited to these children's unique strengths and learning styles. Certainly, the potential loss of talent should concern all of us and become a rallying call for collaborative effort and action for the future.

***Where is the Mirror?***

Where is the mirror?
I don't see it here.
All I see are trees and fields,
Full of wilds
here and there.
The rain's magic always makes
One of me....not two.
Where is the sun?
There it is!
Where is the rain?
There it is!
Where am I? Where is my sha....?
Oh! My Shadow!
Me,
The rainbow
grows in my pen.

**—Natalie, gifted second-grader**

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Joan Franklin Smutny is the director of the Center for Gifted at National-Louis University, and has authored and edited eight books on gifted education.

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# IS YOUR SCHOOL SETTING HEALTHY OR TOXIC?

**by Lisa Rivero Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

(Reprinted and adapted from the book, ***Creative Home Schooling for Gifted Children: A Resource Guide***, by Lisa Rivero, Great Potential Press, 2002)

*These children have no greater obligation than any other children to be future leaders or world class geniuses. They should just be given a chance to be themselves, children who might like to classify their collections of baseball cards by the middle initials of the players, or who might like to spend endless afternoon hours in dreamy reading of novels, and to have an education that appreciates and serves these behaviors. - Jane Piirto (1999)*

Are there some educational programs, practices and philosophies that are actually harmful to gifted children and are toxic academically, socially and emotionally, while other learning environments, whether public school, private school, charter school or home school, are healthy and effective?

We sometimes fool ourselves by thinking that certain educational experiences and settings contain a social and emotional component while others do not. The truth is that *all* learning and social environments shape the child emotionally in some way. Settings that expect gifted children to fit one mold are toxic and have a harmful effect on the child—especially if they expect the child to be like most other children in that grade level, without recognizing the wide variances in ability and personality common with gifted children, or if they equate social and emotional health simply with good behavior or being able to fit in.

Often we think of the well-rounded, emotionally healthy child as the child who fits in, the child who doesn't stand out in any embarrassing way, the child who cooperates effortlessly and participates willingly. The advanced and sensitive gifted child, however, often does *not* fit in with other children and *does* stand out whether she wants to or not. In addition, this advanced learner has a different understanding of cooperation and may prefer to participate on his or her own terms.

## Social and Emotional Needs

Three important realities about the social and emotional needs and development of gifted children are particularly relevant.

(1) **Many social and emotional needs of the gifted child are no different from those of any other child** (Webb, 1993; Webb, 1994). In other words, goals of *acceptance*, *understanding of others*, and *fulfillment of personal potential* are common to us all.

When gifted children are socially and emotionally vulnerable, it is usually due to a lack of fit between characteristics common to the gifted—precociousness and asynchronous development, intensity, perfectionism, sensitivity or complexity—and the child's environment (Webb, 1993). Too often the professionals in educational settings do not understand common traits and behaviors of gifted children, resulting in a setting that is toxic to gifted learners. A child who enters kindergarten already able to multiply numbers in her head, but unable to write, may not be easily accepted by other children (or teachers) who see the child as different or strange. The child will know she is "different" from others and may feel "not O.K."

(2) **What may be normal for gifted children will at times be different from what is normal for their same age peers** (Meckstroth, 1992). The gifted child's excitability may be mistaken for ADHD; his questioning of life's mysteries may be seen as a mood disorder; or his love of organization can be misread as obsessive-compulsive behavior. Likewise, a discrepancy between the speed of this thoughts and his ability to write them down, often quite normal for many gifted children, may be diagnosed as a learning disability (Webb, 2000a). Not surprisingly, parents often remark that sending their child to school feels like trying to fit a square peg in a round hole.

(3) **A child's social and emotional health is intricately bound up with academic needs**. When a child is challenged and able to learn at an appropriate pace and level, the child is closer to *knowledge of self* and *acceptance of others* than if the child is tied to a lockstep or inappropriate curriculum. Children who are not adequately challenged may never know, understand or realize the full extent of their abilities, and because they do not need to *work* to master academic material, may have difficulty accepting and understanding different learning needs of more average learners.

Three important but common gifted characteristics are often misunderstood or ignored by school settings—uneven *development, perfectionism, and complexity*. Here are some questions to consider concerning the relative health and toxicity of learning settings, along with practical strategies.

## Does the Setting Ignore—or Accommodate—Uneven Development?

Children who learn quickly sometimes have areas of uneven, or asynchronous, development. The gifted child is more likely than other children to experience a mismatch between intellectual and psychomotor development, language ability and reasoning development, or intellectual skills and emotional development

(Terrassier, 1985). A gifted elementary school youngster might read at a high school level, for example, but will not be ready emotionally to deal with themes—such as those in books about war or the Holocaust. A gifted youngster might say to a stranger, not realizing his questions are inappropriate, "Are you married?" Or, "Do you have a new car?" Examples like this illustrate the mismatch of intellect and emotional maturity common to many gifted youngsters.

A toxic setting ignores this mismatch and expects children to be even, or at least close, in their developmental levels, and expects emotions and academic performance to also be in sync. Children in such a setting will be considered normal or "O.K." only if they have few "gaps" or discrepancies in ability as evidenced by select areas of strength. For example, too often schools make a child wait to do challenging work in math simply because his skills in all other subjects aren't yet at that same high level. Regrettably, this prevents the child from fulfilling her potential.

Conversely, a healthy educational setting will acknowledge, accept, and accommodate for the fact that it is normal for gifted children to have uneven developmental levels or mismatches between intellect and emotions. Healthy settings will help gifted children deal with these mismatches in development in three important ways: 1) by not forcing the child's development to meet a generic timetable, 2) by being flexible and creative with curriculum materials, and 3) by encouraging self-directed, child-initiated study.

By avoiding generic timetables of development, adults can allow children to accelerate in individual subjects when necessary and can offer them individuated and appropriate work in areas of strength (Rogers, 2002). When a child is working at a higher than age-based grade level, curriculum materials should be chosen with the child's other developmental needs in mind. History resources, for example, could cover high school level material in a way that respects the gifted child's high sensitivity, or a writing program could accommodate the still undeveloped small-motor skills of a young precocious learner.

Adults can also accommodate gifted children's uneven development by giving children greater choice in topics, allowing them to self-regulate levels of challenge and progression of study. Many experts in education recommend that children be given more control over their learning and education (Whitmore, 1980; Span, 1995; Cohen & Gelbrich, 1999; Cohen & Kim, 1999). Prolonged and carefully developed self-directed study can be found in a thematic unit approach, where a topic is studied for a long time, or in the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts & Kercher, 1999), which integrates cognitive, social, and emotional needs.

Adults can *gradually* incorporate self-direction into a child's education, by beginning with one or two subject areas, such as math or reading (Whitmore, 1980). Children can be asked to set their own learning goals for an area of strength. If a child is good at math, for example, the child can work with the teacher or parent to choose curriculum resources and to set learning goals. As the child becomes more comfortable with taking responsibility for her learning, she can slowly add more subjects. The goal becomes that of being a *life-long learner* rather than simply a *good student* (Betts & Kercher, 1999).

Accommodating uneven development, then, means respecting the child's individual developmental timetable through flexibly seeking appropriate curriculum materials. Carefully developed self-directed study can allow the child to learn according to unique internal growth patterns without external pressure to perform according to a generic model of development.

Does your educational setting ignore — or accommodate — uneven development?

**Does the Setting Promote Debilitating — or Pragmatic — Perfectionism?**

Gifted learners are almost by nature perfectionistic, in part because they so easily discern the discrepancies between what is and what could be. They are able to envision perfect achievement, whether or not such achievements are realistic. Consider, for example, a young perfectionistic child who is learning to print. She sees the flawless examples in her handwriting workbook, and does her best to copy the letters on the lines provided for practice. But, as hard as she tries, her letters never look as good as the examples. If she receives grades on her work, a less than perfect grade may cause her to panic. Whereas most of her classmates can accept a "B" or "C" as acceptable work, she may drive herself to develop perfect penmanship at the expense of deeper learning. Or she may give up, refuse to write anything that is not strictly required, and thus avoid facing her inevitable imperfection. The child then thinks of herself as a non-writer, a belief that becomes self-fulfilling. In either case, perfectionism leads to the confusion in her mind of effective verbal communication—writing—with the mechanics and aesthetics of handwriting. Before assuming that an underachieving child is lazy or unmotivated, ask yourself whether she is simply so scared of inevitable imperfection that doing nothing is easier than trying anything.

A toxic setting is one that either refuses to recognize perfectionism or places unrealistic expectations on the child. Parents and teachers often do not recognize the tendency of the gifted child to expect too much from herself. Instead, the paralyzed perfectionistic child is labeled "lazy" or "uncooperative" while the high-achieving perfectionistic child is perceived as successful. Adults, who may assume that they have the responsibility to set high goals and standards for children, are often unaware of the potential dangers to the sensitive child's self-concept. Perfectionistic children usually put enough pressure on themselves to perform; they don't need outside pressure, too. Or, adults might ignore perfectionism, treating it as something that can be cured or, if it is ignored long enough,

as something that will just go away.,

Uneven development, then, often leads to unrealistic expectations on the part of the child or significant adults, which only exacerbate a child's tendency toward perfectionism. In other words, if a child excels in one area, others often expect the child to be superior in other areas. Instead, parents and teachers of gifted children need to accept and understand perfection and put it into its proper perspective.

A healthy educational setting accepts the "drive to perfect"—a "hard-wired" trait of the gifted (Jacobsen, 1999)—as normal, and promotes healthy, *pragmatic perfectionism* by helping children to accept themselves and take necessary risks. The drive to perfect is not always a bad thing. Who would want to be in the hands of a surgeon or a pilot who was not a perfectionist? Silverman (1989) reminds us that perfectionism is "the root of excellence." The urge to perfect is what allows for the joy of learning to play a Chopin etude or to be able to design a bridge that doesn't collapse.

A pragmatic perfectionism allows us to keep in mind overall goals and realistic time frames, as well as expectations of quality. It means being able to say "enough" when necessary and move on to the next activity or day, as well as knowing when it is right to persist toward high goals and standards. Silverman (1989) suggests that children develop healthy perfectionism and set realistic, rather than unreachable, goals when they gain self-confidence. Parents and teachers can support children's confidence in their abilities by allowing them to be involved in complex activities without fear of excessive evaluation, by supporting their desires to set reasonably high goals for themselves, and by encouraging them to appreciate and develop their own unique abilities. We can also help children to understand that whatever high standards we set for ourselves should not be imposed on others, and we can help them view perfectionism as a tool that they can use when needed, and put to the side when it is not. Finally, children should not be ashamed of being able to see how things should be, or of having an urge to perfect (Silverman, 1989). When a child becomes anxious about handwriting, or any other product or performance that isn't quite perfect, we can both accept her feelings and provide some perspective by saying, "I see that you want to be able to do this better. It is difficult right now. But, in time, it will get easier." Parents and teachers can share with their children times in their own lives when they thought they would never get something right ( typing, golf) but eventually did, or times when their expectations were unrealistic, or times when they made mistakes, big and little, and failure led to self-knowledge or other growth.

Learning to fail and to deal with *necessary* risk may be one of the most difficult but one of the most important tasks for young gifted children (Adderholdt-Elliott & Goldberg, 1999). This does not mean that adults should push their children to fail any more than they should push them to succeed, but parents and teachers of gifted children may need to work harder than other parents to find opportunities for their children to experience failure and, more importantly, to see that life goes on, that failure is sometimes necessary for growth, and that it is okay to pursue an activity "just for the fun of it." Sometimes being a good parent or teacher means saying, "An 80% on that quiz is fine for now."

Parents and teachers can also ask themselves if they model a healthy drive to perfect. Do your children see you practice skills, try new things, struggle, fail and succeed, even when doing so results in something that is less than perfection? Are you able to laugh at mistakes and failures rather than model an attitude of anxiety and being "up tight"? Everyone needs areas in which standards of perfection can be relaxed.

We can take *unnecessary* risk out of learning by looking for ways to de-emphasize competition while at the same time encouraging excellence of thought. This helps with perfectionism and also conveys to the child that he is valued for himself, not just for what he can do or how he can perform. Webb (2000b) recommends that parents find just a few minutes on a regular basis to spend one-on-one time with each child, with a rule that the shared activity be non-competitive in nature. Conversation, nature walks, singing, playing catch, or doing a puzzle together are some ideas for parents to try. Teachers can try to find the same one-on-one time with each student once a week, even if only for one or two minutes, when they discuss some topic other than the day's curriculum.

Teachers and parents can find creative ways to take competition out of learning. Try playing Scrabble by sharing each other's letters and without keeping track of points. Play card games such as SET (a matching game) by putting the discovered "sets" in one pile rather than awarding them to individual players. Favorite board and card games can also be played in a non-competitive spirit. In this way, adults can encourage their children to strive for excellence even when there are no individual stakes involved.

Does your educational setting promote debilitating—or pragmatic—perfectionism?

**Does the Setting Emphasize—or De-Emphasize—Grades?**

Objective measures, such as report cards that break the child's learning into parts, may make it harder to see the big picture in terms of a child's educational needs and achievement, as Roeper reminds us:

> [O]bjective measurements imply that we do not try to see who a child is, but think of children in terms of what they can do, academically, physically, or socially. This leads to a partitioning of the individual—the math part, the reading part, the social part, the

> organizing part. As a result, we confront children with a variety of expectations, and then draw conclusions about each child without truly understanding them as complete individuals. We never put Humpty Dumpty together again. (Roeper, 1995, p. 136)

A toxic setting emphasizes grades at the expense of excellence and love of learning. Clark (1992, p. 372) writes that "under the threat of grades, bright students balk at venturing into the unknown or trying any area in which they are not sure they will succeed." She notes, "there is little if any correlation between high school or even college grades and later success" (Clark, 1992). In addition, an emphasis on grades and other extrinsic motivators may put students at risk for the Performance Syndrome, where looking smart and not making mistakes are valued more than learning and doing one's best (Amabile, 1989).

A healthy educational setting keeps evaluation in perspective and emphasizes learning. Parents and teachers may be amazed at just how little formal assessment of needs and evaluation of learning is actually necessary for learning to move forward. Often, learner feedback is built in as a natural and informal part of a learning activity, such as when a very young child learns how tall he can build a tower with blocks before the blocks all fall down, or when an older child sees the highlighted misspelled words in the draft of a computer e-mail message. Children who are learning long division can be encouraged to multiply to check their answers and then revise, if necessary, *before* showing the work to adults. Older children can be given the answer key to textbooks or workbooks they are using, and be encouraged to check their own work upon completion. When learning—not grades—is the goal, cheating becomes meaningless.

Simple family conversation provides natural and enjoyable opportunities for children to see gaps in their learning as well as areas in which they've grown. At home or at school, card games and board games allow parents to provide scaffolding for their children's math and logical thinking skills in a way that has been shown to be more effective in teaching math to young children than computer programs (Healy, 1998). If your child needs practice in mental addition and subtraction, making time for some "unplugged" interactive board and card games may be better than buying the latest CD-ROM or curriculum workbook.

When evaluation or assessment is necessary, adults can think carefully about exactly what needs to be measured and what form is least intrusive in the learning process. Portfolios of student work, self-evaluation (not in comparison to other children), and allowing students to set and track their own learning goals are good alternatives to number or letter grades. Parents and teachers can also help children to see the positive aspects of pursuing excellence. Careful and consistent practice of a violin solo, honing physical skills necessary to do a back flip, or taking the time to learn to bake a tasty loaf of bread can give children a feeling of joy and success. These pursuits of excellence, however, should not be the basis for the child's sense of self-worth. If the violin solo misses a beat, if the back flip results in a fall or the bread collapses, the child needs to be able to put the events in perspective and not see himself as a failure. The book *Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good* by Adderholdt-Elliott and Goldberg (1999), offers other good suggestions.

If you have a child who has been a chronic underachiever in school, as evidenced by grades, don't look for a different school setting as a way to "shape him up" by turning or changing him into a high achiever. Instead, look for a setting that de-emphasizes grades and emphasizes love of learning and personal excellence. Achievement may come in time, but the child must choose it freely; it cannot be forced.

Does your educational setting emphasize—or de-emphasize—grades?

**Does the Setting Rely on—or Resist Using—Unnecessary Labels for Children?**

Labels can be useful abbreviations for constellations of traits and behaviors. By referring to the "visual-spatial learner" or the "gifted learner," we immediately confer a complex meaning to the reader or listener without having to go into a more time-consuming explanation. However, the very complexity of an idea or a child can easily be reduced by the unnecessary use or overuse of labels. Learning styles and personality traits are as varied as are individual children, and no two gifted children are alike.

A toxic setting is any setting that reduces the complexity of children to a label. While understanding a child's preferred modes of learning or dominant personality traits—such as a visual-spatial learning style—can be valuable for both parents and children, a healthy, creative learning environment presumes that such "diagnoses" are never ends in and of themselves, but rather, jumping off places for broader understanding. A healthy educational setting respects the complexity of children and does not label children or force a particular learning style or characteristic, but, rather, encourages children to explore all facets of their personalities and resists the temptation to limit children's views of themselves.

For example, if a child has demonstrated a preference for rational thinking and "staying within the lines," the parent can accept and value this preference, while at the same time being sure to offer the child opportunities to explore safely the passionate side of learning, to extend herself beyond the lines without fear of "not being herself." The adult will be very careful not to call the child "left-brained" in the child's presence, or to show the child overtly or covertly that divergent or more creative behavior is not expected (Liedloff, 1986). This approach is very different from the notion of strengthening a child's

weaknesses, because here the non-preferred dimensions are not seen as weaknesses, but only or merely as options previously seldom chosen. The child remains in control of the choices; the adult provides options, guidance, support and acceptance.

Complexity is one of the more difficult traits of giftedness to understand, but supporting complexity can be as simple as not acting overly surprised when your usually introverted daughter asks to take a theatre class, or offering an outgoing child time for solitude and daydreaming, or making available a wide range of materials and approaches to learning. Parents should also refrain from making defining or "referential" statements like these in their children's presence, such as, "Joe is my logical child, but Jane is my creative one," or "Hannah just isn't a math person," or "Sam is so messy!" or "Jordan has ADD, you know" (Rimm, 1997). Such statements set up and reinforce the child's expectations for his sense of self, and may hold the child back from necessary risk and personal development. Likewise, parents should be careful not to compare a child to other children in the child's hearing (Webb, 2000b). When a child feels no artificial boundaries to her personality or thought processes, when expectations are neither too low nor too narrow, that child is free to experiment with many new ways of being and learning.

Adults can support the complexity of their children by refusing to limit or define them with labels. Does your child's educational setting give children unnecessary labels, or does it resist the use of unnecessary labels and instead encourage complexity of thought and action?

One can debate forever the value of generic types of schools and programs, but more important is the specific individual setting, whether public or private or charter, or home school. The bigger question should be, "Is the learning setting healthy or toxic?"

**Checklist for Health/Toxicity of Educational Settings**

**Gifted Characteristic: Asynchronous Development**

***Healthy:*** Treats uneven abilities and asynchronous development as normal. Follows the child's developmental timetable. Is flexible and creative with curriculum materials. Encourages self-directed, child-initiated learning.
***Toxic:*** Ignores or punishes uneven abilities and mismatches of development. Forces children to fit generic timetables of development. Relies on one-size-fits-all curriculum materials. Discourages learning that is self-directed and self-initiated.

**Gifted Characteristic: Perfectionism**

***Healthy:*** Treats perfectionism as a normal trait of many children. Promotes pragmatic perfectionism by building self-confidence, having realistic expectations, encouraging healthy and necessary risk-taking, and valuing effort and excellence over perfection.
***Toxic:*** Ignores or punishes perfectionism. Promotes debilitating perfectionism by making children feel ashamed of their drive to perfect, insisting on unrealistic expectations, discouraging healthy risk-taking, and valuing competition and perfection over effort and excellence.

**Gifted Characteristic: Complexity**

***Healthy:*** De-emphasizes grades. Emphasizes love of learning and pursuit of excellence. Uses as little formal evaluation as necessary. Resists reliance on unnecessary and reductive labels for children. Does not limit children with defining and descriptive statements.
***Toxic:*** Emphasizes grades. De-emphasizes self-evaluation and love of learning while emphasizing objective measures of worth. Relies on much formal evaluation. Gives unnecessary labels to children. Makes referential statements in children's presence.

**Conclusion**

A child's social and emotional life is never separate from the rest of the child's life. It is not a subject area like math or spelling or physical education, but is fully integrated in every activity, every thought, every experience, including learning settings and tasks. Rather than debate the relative value of generic school settings, parents can evaluate how their child's specific learning settings acknowledge and accommodate common gifted characteristics, such as uneven development, perfectionism, and complexity.

Parents and teachers can use these specific strategies to nurture positive social and emotional growth:
- Support and model healthy risk taking.
- Find ways to de-emphasize competition.
- Reduce unnecessary evaluation of children's activities.
- Value self-directed and self-initiated learning activities.
- Avoid making referential statements in front of children.
- Encourage children to feel good about their gifted characteristics.
- Treat uneven development, perfectionism, and complexity as normal.
- Make time for family conversation and regular special time with each child.

Are we teachers and parents doing all we can to create healthy learning environments for gifted children?

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## ***BOOK REVIEW FROM GIFTED EDUCATION NEWS-PAGE DECEMBER 2001-JANUARY 2002 ISSUE***

**Stand Up for Your Gifted: How to Make the Most of Kids' Strengths at School and at Home. (2001) by Joan Franklin Smutny. Foreword by Jerry Flack. Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis, MN.**

This book addresses an important need in the gifted field by providing parents with clear and concise information on many topics pertaining to identification, education and advocacy issues. Smutny has also presented numerous case studies related to each topic that will help parents understand the daily problems of raising and educating their gifted children. Each major section (***Starting at Home***, ***Going to School***, and ***Moving Into the Community and Beyond***) has several chapters discussing the advocacy issues parents should learn about and apply in their homes and schools. For example, the section on ***Starting at Home*** has chapters on Understanding Giftedness, Understanding Your Child's Gifts, Providing a Haven for Learning, and others related to this section. The ***Going to School*** section includes chapters on Understanding Gifted Education, Getting to Know Your Child's School, Getting Involved in Your Child's Education, and Searching Out Other Education Options. The Final section, ***Moving Into the Community and Beyond***, contains the following chapters: Connecting with Other Parents, Taking a Stand in Gifted Education, and Taking Care of Yourself. In the ***Other Resources*** section of this book, Smutny has included a list of publishers of gifted education materials and national organizations concerned with educating the gifted. We highly recommend this book to all parents who need a comprehensive resource for understanding the gifted field and learning how to provide the best possible education for their gifted children.

**Related Resources** ***(FROM GIFTED EDUCATION NEWS-PAGE DECEMBER 2001-JANUARY 2002 ISSUE)***. In Joan Smutny's discussion of the characteristics of giftedness, she says that sensibility is one of the key characteristics. Here are additional resources that discuss the importance of accessing and stimulating gifted children's sensibility levels:

Fisher, Maurice D. (1992). Early Childhood Education for the Gifted: The Need for Intense Study and Observation. **Journal of the**

**Illinois Association for Gifted Children**, 11, 6-9.

Fisher, Maurice D. (1994). **Fisher Comprehensive Assessment of Giftedness Scale: What to Look for When Identifying Gifted Students**. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press.

Fisher, Maurice D. (1998). A Sensibility Approach to Identifying and Assessing Young Gifted Children. In Joan Smutny (Ed.). **The Young Gifted Child: Potential and Promise, an Anthology**. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

Fisher, Maurice D. , and Walters, Michael E. (2000). Educating All Gifted Children for the 21st Century: Proposal for Training Regular Classroom Teachers. **Journal of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children**, 4-10.

Fisher, Maurice D. , and Walters, Michael E. (2002). The Future of the Gifted in the 21st Century: The Need for Creative Solutions to Perennial Problems. **Journal of the Illinois Association for Gifted Children**, 18-23.

Walters, Michael E. (1990) **Teaching Shakespeare to Gifted Students, Grades Six Through Twelve: An Examination of the Sensibility of Genius**. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press.

Walters, Michael E. (1996). **Humanities Education for the 21st Century**. Manassas, VA: Gifted Education Press.

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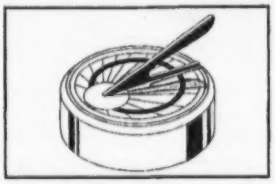

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With the opening of the fall semester, I wish all of you a productive 2002-03 school year. Clearly, this is a very different beginning for students and teachers than in previous years. The nation will be involved in extensive 9/11 commemoration ceremonies, and the War on Terrorism might result in a military confrontation with Iraq in the next few months. The current emphasis of many public education institutions appears to be on trimming special programs and demonstrating student progress through constant, repetitious testing. What can we in the gifted field do to prevent the decline of gifted programs in the current atmosphere of shrinking budgets and changing national priorities? Step one is to question the roots of gifted education, and ask how these programs can become essential to the overall educational enterprise.

The high ability, curiosity and sensibility levels of gifted students are the educational reasons for providing differentiated programs. Educators must demonstrate that they can harness these characteristics in an effective manner to achieve the maximum educational development of gifted students. Obviously, watered-down enrichment programs will not be of much help. But programs that harness their high levels of curiosity can benefit everyone – gifted students, teachers, parents and school districts. Gifted students who are provided with the opportunity to study subjects in great detail, and who can identify the major factors and ideas that distinguish the United States from other countries will be an asset to their schools, community and the nation. Their in-depth study of history (beginning in the elementary grades) should concentrate on the distinctive features of our society and government. The resilience and self-correcting nature of American democracy are historical facts that have helped us to overcome such catastrophes as the Civil War, World War II, the Vietnamese War, and the violent explosion of bigotry in the 1960s. Programs for the gifted should emphasize these facts on a daily basis. Biographies such as **John Adams** (2001) by David McCullough can be used to show how Adam's resilience and ability to learn from mistakes were the keys to his and the nation's political greatness.

I am honored to present an article by Carol Horn on techniques for improving the academic performance of gifted minority students. Ms. Horn is the Coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program in the Fairfax County, Virginia Public Schools, one of the largest and most rigorous public school programs for the gifted in the United States. Andrew Flaxman, Director of Educate Yourself for Tomorrow, discusses the importance of humanities education for gifted students, while Beth Wright, a homeschooling parent, writes about performing arts programs for the gifted. Michael Walters presents an essay on the importance of using biographies to teach the gifted.

**Maurice D. Fisher, Ph.D., Publisher**

# RAISING EXPECTATIONS OF CHILDREN FROM POVERTY

BY CAROL HORN FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Can school be structured in such a way that all students are held to high expectations? What are the critical elements of a school environment that enables students to find meaning and relevance through challenging and engaging learning experiences? These are just a few of the essential questions that must be answered if we intend to embed high expectations, relevant learning experiences, and a respect for differences in the total learning environment so that all the students will benefit from a dynamic and rigorous curriculum that matches their educational needs.

Though all children need learning experiences that prepare them to succeed in a complex and competitive world, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to engage in such experiences unless they are created by the school. Without formal education, individuals are trained and influenced by the customs and traditions of the cultural group into which they are born (Dewey, 1916). Thus, schools can be powerful agents of change when they provide a context in which students are able to escape the limitations of their home life and develop potential that might not be realized without the opportunities that a school can provide. Deborah Meier's work in Harlem is an excellent example of the transformative nature of an education that inspires students to invent theories, think critically and reflect on their own ideas as well as the ideas of others (Meier, 1995). Her work provides compelling and convincing evidence that schools can create environments that allow all students to transcend prescribed limitations and that every child has the capacity to think and generate new insights and ideas when given the right catalyst.

## Learning Environment

A safe and democratic learning environment in which respect and responsibility extend beyond staying out of trouble and obeying school rules is a critical component for developing a school atmosphere that nurtures student thinking and cognitive growth. One disadvantage of the direct instruction and extrinsic reward approach that is often used with economically disadvantaged students, is that the students are manipulated and controlled by those in authority. When the authority is removed they lack not only the necessary skills needed to make their own decisions, but also an understanding of the concepts and ideas that they are expected to embrace. When the school and classroom community are built using a total collaborative effort, students create their own rules and limits, identify issues and problems they want to pursue, and work together on projects that accept and encourage diverse ideas and multiple modes of learning (Beane, 1997). A collaborative effort between two local schools and a community center allowed a group of fourth through sixth graders to design and paint a mural on the walls of a local community center. The students not only learned the art of graphic design, they also learned the importance of collaboration and compromise as they worked together to design and agree on a mural that reflected their interests and ideas. Cooperation and communication, two important characteristics for future success, were nurtured and cultivated throughout the enterprise.

## Building on Student Strengths and Interests

Each student has a unique profile of strengths that they can learn to use not only to their advantage, but to help and assist others. A curriculum that is extended and enriched with engaging activities can build on these strengths and transport student learning beyond prescribed formats in ways that are designed to endure.

Giving students choices and allowing them to pursue learning that connects to personal interests as well as their life beyond the classroom are critical motivators for learning that extends beyond the classroom door. Once students are engaged in learning that is meaningful, relevant, and challenging, they are more likely to continue the learning process both in and out of school. In a recent study of the rainforests, a fifth grade student wrote, *at first I thought that the rainforests were dangerous places and that the animals in the rainforest eat people. But they don't . . . I learned that animals eat plants and other animals in the rainforest*...later, as he became fascinated with pictures of rainforest people that he found in old National Geographic Magazines at the library, he wrote, *I also thought that there were not any people in the rainforest. But I learned there are tribes of people and their kids don't have to go to school– now I want to find out why*. The pictures were the hook, and this student wanted to learn about the children of the rainforest. Choice and ownership lit the spark of intrinsic motivation as he discovered one aspect of a topic that he wanted to learn more about.

In addition to student interests, real world concerns and problems that connect to students' lives provide students with an opportunity to research information, consider multiple perspectives, reflect on possibilities, and pose solutions as they gain knowledge and search for answers. By connecting the curriculum to issues and concerns that have meaning for them, students learn to actively seek solutions that may have long-term effects on their lives (Beane, 1997). In one sixth grade class, a discussion of an article titled, ***Can Kids Keep Other Kids from Smoking?*** led to an extensive anti-smoking campaign in which the students shared the knowledge and insights they learned with their younger peers. The students wrote letters to the principal requesting permission to initiate a campaign, and then created

speeches, plays, posters, and buttons to persuade younger students not to smoke. Throughout the learning process, students made connections and considered possibilities they were not aware of before and strengthened their own resolve not to smoke.

**Social/Emotional Support**

For students who live in poverty, social and emotional support becomes a very complex process. Their disengagement from school is often the result of low teacher expectation and an academic labeling that narrows their options and eliminates opportunities (Dei, George, J., J. Mazzuca, E. McIsaac, and J. Zine 1997). They are also vulnerable to the effects of peer pressure and may fear isolation from friends and family if they place too much emphasis on school. Low achievement becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and it must be changed in two directions. Not only must teachers believe that such students can work at higher levels, but the students also must believe they can do the work. This becomes possible when the curricula are organized around meaningful learning experiences that challenge students to think and apply new knowledge on increasingly higher levels. While studying ecosystems, a fifth grader asked, "What is this word ecology?" The sound of it fascinated her although she had no idea what it meant. Later, after further reading and research, she wrote, *I learned how humans, plants, animals and other physical elements are connected in an interdependent web. Ecocystems are connected to one another on various levels and some of these connections are very complex and difficult to detect or even imagine... I have learned so much about ecology that I think I would like to become an ecologist...* Learning experiences that pave the way for an upward spiral of learning increase self-efficacy and promote continuous growth.

**Integrated Curriculum**

A curriculum that allows students to become co-owners of the learning process has a lasting impact on students' lives. Problem-centered themes, that have been identified and chosen by students, also provide opportunities for them to explore knowledge in an integrated approach that builds multiple levels of understanding. When students have the opportunity to delve deeper into subject matter, they discover new insights and are motivated to further investigate the implications of their findings. Through a study of ecosystems and endangered species, a young student learned that snow leopards were an indicator species (their own well being reflects the environment around them), and she began to wonder how the extinction of the snow leopard would affect its surrounding ecosystem. She explored with other students what it meant to be endangered, the long and short-term consequences of extinction, and the effectiveness of laws and education. By sharing information and reflecting on ideas as they learn, students begin to examine their own ideas in a much broader context. When learning is organized through an integrated curriculum, students are able to create connections, bridge gaps, and apply learning in a context that has meaning, relevance, and lasting value.

**Real-world Learning Experiences**

All students need the freedom and encouragement to discover and explore deeper understandings and applications of knowledge through investigations that allow them to learn the habits of mind and tools of inquiry that are required of an expert. Because they lack basic skills, children from poverty are often limited to a prescribed format with limited opportunities to learn from practitioners in the field. When these students are afforded opportunities to engage in real-world learning experiences, motivation increases and their world-view is enriched and extended. In order to make a study of the interdependence of different systems more relevant to students' lives, a teacher had her sixth grade students explore their connection to a bay through a study of its watershed. Each student learned his/her watershed address and the impact of that connection on the health of the bay. A guest speaker from a water management bureau explained how the shape and area of drainage were important considerations when studying a watershed. His presentation provided the students with an excellent opportunity to ask questions and learn about watersheds and water management from an expert in the field.

Later, this study of the bay and its watershed culminated in a field trip to a research center where the students replicated the work of scientists. They conducted tests to determine the quality of the water and observed the many different kinds of plants and animal life as they explored the connections between biotic and abiotic elements of this rich environment. While some students created graphs and charts to illustrate their observations, others analyzed and interpreted the data in order to assess the health of the bay. Over time, the students began to understand the bay as a dynamic system with many complex interdependent elements. Real world learning experiences provided them with multiple opportunities to develop and strengthen their knowledge, understanding, and skills in work that was challenging to their minds and meaningful to their lives.

**A Global Perspective**

As we evolve into a diverse global society, curriculum needs to incorporate and address the changing, varied perspectives that are an integral part of a global society. By focusing on concerns, news items, and important events that address global issues (i.e. economic survival, political decision-making, and human rights) students learn to challenge and discuss alternatives to main-stream ideologies and seek solutions that are in alignment with a more inclusive pluralistic view of society.

When multi-cultural learning activities are integrated throughout the curriculum, students have the opportunity to connect new knowledge to their own life experiences. Poems, stories, and plays that contain dialect, relevant role models, and varying

cultural life styles may be used to add relevancy. Often, Black History Week or Hispanic Week is the only time that children of color see their reflections in the lives of leaders and exemplary role models. By integrating poets, authors, inventors, scientists, mathematicians, world leaders, and others of color who have made significant contributions to society into the entire learning experience, their self-worth is increased and the possibilities for the future are enhanced. It is important that students see their reflections in leaders who have made signification contributions to the world. When students are given the opportunity to study a diverse group of leaders who have changed the world for the better, they are able to recognize that the traits and characteristics these people possess cross all the lines of color, class, and culture.

In addition, as students advance in their knowledge, skill, and understanding of the world in which they live, they need opportunities to observe and interact with role models and mentors, especially those from familiar backgrounds. This allows them to see the numerous opportunities that are available to them as they pursue their areas of strength. A study of people from many cultures as well as interaction and mentoring by diverse professionals must be an integral part of a curriculum that fosters a global perspective (Banks, 1994).

**Higher Level Thinking Skills**

When higher-level thinking skills are embedded in the total school experience, students learn to apply and use these skills in other areas of their lives as well. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds tend to receive more of a rote learning and skills-based approach, which does little or nothing to stimulate creative and critical thinking. Critical and creating thinking skills can be nurtured through problem-solving and problem-posing activities that challenge students to question the answers, formulate their own ideas, and seek solutions that are not ordinarily considered. Thinking, reasoning, reflecting, discussing, and applying new ideas are essential characteristics of a climate of learning that encourages students to think on a higher level, challenge existing ideas, and entertain new possibilities for the future. Four instructional strategies that promote and nurture a thinking classroom are problem-centered learning, debates, Socratic seminars, and independent research. Conversation and collaboration are key elements, for it is through an exchange of ideas that new thinking evolves. When students learn to test their beliefs by immersing them in a more objective reality, they identify the elements that survive and adapt or release those that do not.

When a sixth grade student learned that oil spills were a major threat to sea otters, she decided to find out why and researched changes in their population over time. She learned that the oil ruins their fur and endangers their survival. She created graphs to illustrate how their numbers had been declining but were now starting to increase again and then searched for reasons to explain why. In her journal she wrote, *I am beginning to realize that in order to be sure that they will survive, we have to understand these animals, educate others, and think of ways to protect them.* During her class presentation, she taught her peers about these fascinating animals and used a model of their habitat to demonstrate the devastating effects that oil spills have on the sea otter population. Another sixth grade student used a US Atlas and a graph to determine if nuclear power plants caused cancer. He made a graph of all the cancer victims and the number of nuclear power plants. Surprisingly, Illinois had the highest number of nuclear power plans but had one of the lowest cancer rates. He then discovered a chart in a chemistry book that showed that only .15% of the radiation we receive every year comes from nuclear power plants. He decided that such a low value couldn't have an effect so he concluded that nuclear power plants do not have an effect on cancer rates. Numbers and percentages became relevant and important as he learned to interpret their significance in order to enhance his understanding of the facts.

Student debates provide another excellent opportunity for students to think critically about a broad spectrum of issues, ranging from gun control to diplomatic immunity to school uniforms. Thinking and reflecting become important components as students explore issues from opposing sides, identify key aspects, and create speeches to persuade the audience that their argument is the stronger one. The debate format provides a flexible framework for differentiating the instruction in order to meet a specific learner's needs. While advanced learners are developing sophisticated reasoning skills, other students are learning persuasive writing and speaking skills, and strugglers learn to create a strong opinion statement backed by research. All students have the opportunity to participate in an engaging process that stimulates lively and good-natured competition and encourages individual growth. Debates are engaging, have a real world connection, provide time for interaction and planning, and teach children to value and defend their ideas. Children from a low socioeconomic background need opportunities to debate and explore the issues that may significantly impact their lives and their futures. Debates provide a forum that is safe and engaging, while giving them the opportunity to practice the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills that they need to develop so that their voices will be heard.

Another instructional strategy that improves literacy and challenges students to think and apply knowledge on a higher level is the Socratic Seminar. A thoughtful dialogue that fosters reflective and critical thinking, the seminar stimulates lively discussions of a wide variety of texts, promotes rigorous thinking, and a deeper understanding of ideas, issues, and values (Lambright, 1995). Teachers who use the Socratic method provide their students a unique opportunity to learn from and with each other. A careful selection of historical documents, literature, and current events is used to initiate lively discussions that challenge students to think critically and synthesize their own ideas. For example, a recent seminar discussion of ***Through My Eyes*** (1999) by Ruby Bridges allowed fourth grade

students to explore the civil rights movement from the perspective of a child, close to their own age. With the courage and the support of a loving mom, Ruby changed history in a way that impacted their own classroom. In their initial response to the written selection the students included such thoughts as, "I liked how Ruby kept her chin up...she was a brave little girl." "Everybody is made of the same skin and bones but we may be different colors or believe in different things. We should be treated equally." The initial responses allowed students to reflect on the text and make connections to prior knowledge as they began to build their own understandings of the writing. During the seminar discussion, students shared and debated different viewpoints, supported their opinions with clear reasoning and evidence, considered alternative views, and identified areas of agreement and disagreement. Through this dynamic conversation, they constructed knowledge, increased understandings, and expanded their thinking in new and meaningful ways. As they began to understand the challenges and hardships that Ruby endured as the first black child to enroll and attend a previously all white school, they gained a new appreciation of the broader issues of civil rights and what equal opportunity for all citizen really means. The students also discussed how the racial and ethnic make up of their class would be different today if it had not been for people like Ruby; and how fortunate they are to live in a time when they can all work and learn together.

Independent research provides meaningful learning and varying degrees of freedom within a flexible framework that is not always available to economically disadvantaged students. Opportunities to engage in independent, in-depth research, allow students to discover a wide range of topics and endless possibilities that connect to personal interests and encourage enquiring minds. As they search for knowledge and solutions about topics that are connected to real world issues and relevant concerns, students learn to seek information using myriad resources. They also learn and practice investigative and formal research techniques that train them to develop highly abstract ideas, use inductive thinking, see connections, and solve problems. As they learn to organize, apply, and evaluate the information and data that they collect, they are able to create products and presentations that apply what they have learned in a meaningful way. In order to strengthen and refine their thinking, research, and communication skills, students need ongoing opportunities to explore areas of interest and share what they learn with others. Learning preferences, interests, and ability levels are considered and addressed as students gain an understanding of a topic from many different sources, formulate their own opinions on the topic and become personally involved in a quest for knowledge.

**A Final Note**

As educators, we can create environments that inspire all students to reach new heights. By encouraging students to question the answers, reflect on their own thinking, develop problem solving skills, pursue independent research, and seek multiple connections, schools can raise expectations for all students in ways that will motivate, challenge, and endure.

**Resources**

Apple, M. W. and Beane, J. A. (1995). ***Democratic Schools***. Assocation for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA.

Banks, James A. (1994). ***Multiethnic Education: Theory and Practice***. Allyn and Bacon: Boston.

Beane, James A. (1997). ***Curriculum Integration***. Teachers College Press: Columbia University.

Dei, George J., Mazzuca, J., McIsaac, E., and Zine, J. (19997). ***Reconstructing 'Drop-out' a Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School***. University of Toronto Press: Toronto.

Delpit, Lisa. (1995). ***Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom***. The New Press: New York.

Dewey, John. (1916). ***Democracy and Education***. The Free Press: New York.

Dewey, John. (1902). **The *Child and the Curriculum***. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Meier, Deborah. (1995). ***The Power of Their Ideas***. Beacon Press: Boston.

Roberts, Terry. (1998). ***The Power of Paideia Schools***. Assocation for Supervision and Curriculum Development: Alexandria, VA. ★★★

***September Birthdays to Remember:*** Seiji Ozawa–Conductor, Christa McAuliff–Astronaut, Richard Wright–Author, Grandma Moses–Painter, Elizabeth I–Queen of England, Agatha Christie–Author, Greta Garbo–Actress, Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton–Musician, Upton Sinclair–Author, Stephen King–Author, H.G. Wells–Author, Andrea Bocelli–Opera Singer, Ray Charles–Soul Singer, F. Scott Fitzgerald–Author, Glenn Gould–Concert Pianist, Dmitri Shostakovich–Composer, William Faulkner–Author, George Gershwin–Composer, T.S. Eliot–Poet, Al Capp-Cartoonist, Miguel de Cervantes–Author, Truman Capote–Author, Buddy Rich–Drummer, Peter Sellers–Comedian, Sid Caesar–Comedian, Roger Maris–Baseball Player, Arnold Palmer-Golfer, Mel Torme-Singer, Lauren Bacall–Actress.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES IN CONFRONTING EVIL IN THE WORLD TODAY

BY ANDREW FLAXMAN EDUCATE YOURSELF FOR TOMORROW
WEST BARRINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS

How do we respond to the appalling terrorist activities and threats that have become part of our daily news? A proper study of the humanities will give us the necessary wisdom and strength to confront this evil. For example, one message from history that we should take to heart is how Abraham Lincoln was able to confront the evil of slavery. In his message to Congress on December 1, 1862 amidst political and military setbacks and pressing questions about the Union and slavery he said: "The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country." Disenthrall is a word we do not use much anymore, but it means to free ourselves from bondage. Lincoln meant that we have to re-think to save ourselves. The word repent also means to re-think. It is in our awakened thinking capacities that we can find the wisdom that is needed to confront and transform evil and save our country.

Now that we are confronted by people who are willing to die for their ideology which includes hatred, killing and the destruction of freedom, we must develop the courage and wisdom to respond. Violence in response to ignorance will only bring on more violence. The study of Liberal Arts will reward a sensitive student with insights about what it takes to re-think so that we can overcome fear and transform evil in the world. One of the great humanists of the 20th century, Gandhi, instructed us well with the idea that to change the world you need to change yourself first.

A good place to start this self-transformation through the study of Liberal Arts is our great heritage from ancient Greece. For hundreds of years, from all over the ancient world, kings and commoners traveled to Delphi to ask the Oracle of Apollo about the right course of action — whether to make war or seek peace, whether to marry one person or another. They brought rich offerings to the god and were sent on their way by the priests with riddling answers.

And yet, over the entrance to the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi was the admonition: "Know Thyself!" This ancient wisdom suggested that the true oracle lies within. The answers to the great human questions, public and private, are found not outside us but only through an inner journey of the seeking spirit. The crucial importance of developing self-knowledge can best be understood in the words of another ancient piece of wisdom: The Hebraic Talmud says, "We do not see things the way they are, we see things the way we are." In other words, we grind the lenses with which we see the world.

What exactly is the SELF? Civilized people today generally see themselves in a physical and psychological- religious dimension but remain unconscious of any further aspect of their being. The question is how do we develop deeper insights so that we can acknowledge and integrate intuition, imagination and inspiration into our conscious everyday lives?

Development of such self-knowledge requires being able to learn to have an "open eye". This is what liberal arts education should teach but most often does not. The word "Liberal" has the same root as "Liberate." Liberal Arts should be the study of what leads to freedom, as in "The truth shall set you free." The proper study of the humanities should help free one from traditional programming and help us to become more autonomous and creative.

The conventional approach to the Humanities too often has consisted in rote teaching, memory training and problem solving. Opening the "inner eye" requires experiencing the "I" as an integrated whole, an ego (Latin for "I") that balances thinking, feeling, and willing. Increased mastery of this integrative process leads to the ability to distinguish between true intuition and mere whim; between inspiration and empty abstract thought; between creative imagination and disconnected fantasy.

Such personal development goes against the present flow of conventional Western thought. For 500 years, Western civilization has developed itself through the exploration and conquest of the "outer" world. This progress seems to have come from a scientific materialistic philosophy. The world viewed with this attitude appears separated from our inner being. And yet, if one looks more deeply — imagination, inspiration, and intuition — all spiritual, integrative processes, are at the core of our scientific and cultural discoveries. Einstein, to take one example, has said that he valued his ability to speculate and fantasize above his mathematical skill. The "new physics" is based on doing away with the old attitude that "I am here and it's out there." The observed, say the new physicists studying sub-atomic phenomena, is always changed by the observer.

Yet so much of the way we think and live is structured in dualism (binary thinking), the commonplace way of thinking in terms of either/or, bad/good, inner/outer. Whether our faith is in science, progress, God, human nature or government, our outlook is often confined to dualities. Only enhanced self-knowledge enables us to transcend the temporary illusion of duality and one-sided materialism. An experience of opening the "I" breaks through to the integration of head, heart and creativity that is the core of all reality — the "patterns of organic energy" with which the Zen masters of ancient China were concerned.

To satisfy the universal need for inner direction, many are turning toward gurus, cult figures, drugs and pseudo-Christianity (close-mindedness, intolerance, hatred and violence in the name of Christianity). People who choose to neglect their own self-development through self-knowledge can become attracted to

and become locked into unhealthy, unfree solutions for their doubts, illnesses, insecurities and dissatisfactions. This danger of turning to authoritarianism and violence is with us today when we are so fearful of terrorism.

Where do we find constructive help in this difficult journey into ourselves? We can turn to the great artists, writers, thinkers, statesmen and scientists throughout history who have communicated their heightened sense of awareness through their work. They have tried to awaken us to a higher view of ourselves through artistic forms and significant deeds. Their examples can make clear to us that we have more than just five senses. We can go beyond our material senses to deeper levels of cognition. We all have dormant organs of finer perception which have always been cultivated by leading Human Beings throughout history. If we can understand and absorb their insights, we can ourselves participate more completely in the great creative force that drives humankind forward and upward.

So often what we search for is to be found right in front of our noses. It is the same with life itself. It's like a game of hide-and-seek that we play with the self we know and the self we are trying to find. And the method that we can use is also right before us in our own great culture and tradition. It is only a matter of learning how to "see better" as the loyal Earl of Kent implores Shakespeare's King Lear. Wonderfully, the hidden dimensions of the I, the SELF, can be discovered through literature, art and music.

To those who do not understand the spiritual dimensions of "Know Thyself!" self-knowledge appears to be narcissism. To those who have had this inner-experience, it is a path to community service. It is the goal of true education to cultivate that which is the best within each of us.

The new curriculum at many universities includes selections from non-Western, female and minority sources. The changes reflect the recognition that the traditional approach to the Humanities has great limitations. However, in spite of good intentions, the quest for universal relevance in education will continue to go astray so long as Humanities advocates do not realize that higher education must be founded on the conscious development of these dormant cognitive organs leading to a deeper understanding of the human condition. The development of the whole Human Being — no matter what the sex, color or race — must be fostered.

No unifying theme has been consciously applied to our secularized education, and the Liberal Arts curriculum has become over-specialized and over-intellectualized at the expense of an education of the heart and the will. Of course, revision of the traditional core curriculum of the Humanities is not a recent phenomenon. At the very onset of our modern curriculum development, Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the great Moravian educator responsible for many aspects of modern education, saw the potential pitfalls that have come to be. For those who are unfamiliar with Comenius, his book, **The Visible World in Pictures** (1658), was the first textbook in which pictures were as important as the text. He was determined to translate into reason what previously had existed as tradition. In The Temple of Pansophia, he wrote that he wished to construct a temple of Wisdom that would serve as a sacred edifice for education similar to the Temple of Solomon. His temple was to house a school of universal wisdom, a workshop for attaining all of the skills necessary for life and the future.

Comenius advocated a comprehensive education taught in the vernacular. He promoted the establishment of many more schools and universities. He was asked to design the curriculum for the recently established Harvard College, but instead chose to organize Sweden's educational system. He pioneered the use of academic specialization but warned that if the spiritual focus were not emphasized, educational unity would be lost. We have arrived at that point today. Instead of being equal to the task of combating terrorism, the humanities seems weak and impractical. We know more and more about less and less. Without any unifying principals with which to appreciate the value of Liberal Arts and to relate it to our lives, education is bereft of wisdom.

***The proper study of the Humanities should include:***

An understanding of the importance of love in education, and the development of human relationships based on such an attitude. This is especially important as we confront the teaching of hate in education in many schools throughout the world, and even in this country.

Recognition of the ever-changing ways we view ourselves and the world we live in — the evolution of individual human consciousness.

An appreciation of the growth of personal freedom as it has evolved in the Western Tradition. This is one of the aspects which so frightens religious fundamentalists of all stripes.

An emphasis on the potential for self-development and self-transformation inherent in each individual. This slumbering power in each of us is crucial if we are to successfully overcome the power of hatred and ignorance.

An awareness of how each subject relates to the experience of "I AM" as the balanced center of thinking, feeling and willing.

A sense of integrating the whole as well as clearly distinguishing the parts of each subject.

An exploration of the creative and artistic elements in our lives and in civilization in addition to the factual and intellectual elements.

Before the gifted student studies the Humanities, it is important to mention that certain positive mental and psychological attitudes are necessary for this type of self-education and training for heightened self-awareness. These are as follows:

Moments of inner tranquility are required, that state of being where you are at peace with yourself. A sincere student must

learn to practice stepping aside from the turmoil of daily life with its incessant distractions. These moments of inner tranquility should be taken as a starting point for self-education. To some extent, thoughtful contemplation and objectivity are possible only at these selected disciplined times.

It is essential that one learn to know one's feeling and then be able to become dispassionate. This putting aside of one's likes and dislikes and seeking to examine what is, not what gratifies, leads to a state of objective awareness quite different from the familiar personal and subjective condition.

This conscious objectivity allows us to see things from different points of view and enables us to see some truth, purpose and meaning even in attitudes and behavior we otherwise might find totally abhorrent. This ability does not make us lose our sense of judicious discrimination – on the contrary, it enhances this sense and our understanding of the world.

By withholding and suspending judgement we keep our mind open to new discoveries. As soon as we judge, we limit our curiosity and thought.

We are thus able to understand how often we have "thrown out the baby with the bath water." Disagreements, prejudice and criticism often lead us to miss crucial insights that can enrich our lives.

True open-mindedness and thoughtful objectivity leads to "learned ignorance" which overcomes intellectual arrogance and false pride. The more we learn, the more we understand how much we do not know.

We desperately need this wisdom because we are at a crossroad in civilization. Will the terrorist threat wake us up to our hidden strengths, or will we fall back to blind retribution and counter-violence. We can increasingly harden ourselves and isolate ourselves from the universe and each other — through extreme forms of materialism and escapist religion and spirituality. Or we can learn from the best of civilization by studying and applying the great lessons of the past. We can become a part of the evolution of humankind towards a future of freedom and love.

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## PERFORMING ARTS INSTRUCTION FOR EXCEPTIONALLY AND PROFOUNDLY GIFTED CHILDREN

**BY BETH WRIGHT NEWPORT NEWS, VIRGINIA**

What special considerations do parents and educators need to make when planning performing arts instruction for exceptionally and profoundly gifted (hereafter referred to as eg/pg) children? Such children are marked by specific traits, about which parents and educators must be familiar in order to properly accommodate this special population.

Recent neurological research points to radical differences in the brains of exceptionally gifted children. In his paper, *The Gifted Brain*, Australian researcher, John Geake quotes Alexander, O'Boyle, and Benbow as saying, "...gifted subjects may have an unusually rapid and high level development of interhemispheric interactions...the area where structural and functional development are most closely related are the frontal lobes-gifted adolescents [13 years old] and college students [20 years old] have a similar level of brain maturation in these regions." (Geake, 2000).

Gifted education researchers and advocates have bemoaned the shortcomings of gifted education instruction in most schools. Pull-outs, special classes, accommodations within grade level, and other half-hearted attempts at educating our country's brightest have failed to meet the needs of eg/pg children. These children are as different from mildly and moderately gifted children as the profoundly retarded are from the mildly retarded (Silverman, 2002).

What type of educational approach do the experts recommend? An individualized curriculum that accommodates asynchrony (a trait common to eg/pg children, described as varying levels of proficiency and ability that may result in uneven academic and social development), and the child's specific strengths and weaknesses is touted as the best for our ablest learners. Tutorials, mentorships, and curricula tailored to meet the individual child's needs all benefit eg/pg children most. But, how can parents and educators translate such advice to performing arts instruction?

There are three key issues that are crucial to the successful integration of gifted education theory in arts instruction: affective, cognitive, and instructional. Through understanding these issues, parents and teachers may better help the eg/pg child maximize his performing arts potential and achieve his dreams.

### Affective Issues Are Paramount

Affective, or emotional issues reign supreme in the life of eg/pg children. Sometimes described as "skinless," most eg/pg people seem to feel things more intensely. An unusual insight into moral issues, an ability to empathize with others, and a high regard for beauty all combine to make eg/pg children highly sensitive.

Such sensitivity may also work against them when they intuitively understand what "perfect" should look like. Perfectionism, the double edged sword of giftedness, drives the eg/pg child to achieve, yet torments him when he doesn't. Leading to feelings of failure, this inner locus of control may actually hold the child back when he doesn't believe himself capable of attainment of the ideal. As one mother puts it, "They may see nothing between perfect and awful; the phrase, 'I'll

never get it' is a major part of their vocabularies..." (private communication, 2002).

The eg/pg child does so many things well, and with such little effort, that pushing through such inner conflict in order to persevere may prove too daunting. Parents and educators should teach eg/pg children that small "failures" are part of the process and perseverance produces big rewards. Sometimes it helps for the child to witness a parent or other mentor struggling with a new task, stumbling and falling a bit while on the front end of the learning curve. Avoiding condescension, the adult can gently teach the child that everyone struggles with something, and there is no shame in not knowing how, not being perfect, or not achieving the first time around!

Researchers have given a name to one of the most pronounced affective aspects of high-level giftedness. Originally theorized by the Polish psychiatrist/psychologist, Kazimierz Dabrowski and later modified by Michael Piechowski, PhD, overexcitabilities are a set of five functions the eg/pg child has to a pronounced degree. (Lind, 2000) Called overexcitabilities because they describe categories of stimuli that provoke disproportionate responses from eg/pg people, these categories include:

- Psychomotor: high energy, rapid speech, constant movement
- Sensual: sensitivity to sights, smells, tastes, textures, sounds, etc...
- Intellectual: inquisitive, voracious reading, theoretical thinking
- Imaginational: inventive, dreamy, metaphorical, creative
- Emotional: highly sensitive, intuitive, empathetic

How do these oversensitivities affect training in the performing arts? Highly imaginative cognitively advanced children may need to "see" themselves creating beauty with their music or dance. They may feel like failures when their practice sessions are "ugly" or awkward. These young musicians and dancers are quite likely to hold to an image of perfection derived from the work of more accomplished artists. In holding themselves to such exacting standards, they create inner conflict and angst.

The eg/pg theater student may strive to understand and internalize a play's character and, thus, give it life. Without the proper coaching from a sensitive theater teacher or director, the student may feel a sense of vagueness, a colorless recitation when portraying a character's role that leaves the student feeling disconnected from the character's true nature. Such disconnection may elicit feelings of failure in the gifted theater student. Due to these subtle complexities, eg/pg child performers may be unsatisfied with their work, even when everyone praises and adores their accomplishments. (Sand, 2000).

These children are often driven to excel. Many work tirelessly to master a domain, and parents may be hard pressed to keep up with them. (Sand, 2000). Intensity is a characteristic closely associated with very high IQ, and eg/pg children may throw themselves into a production or program wholeheartedly. They can become deeply frustrated when directors or other participants do not share their pursuit of excellence.

One mom says, "Our twelve-year-old profoundly gifted daughter is an actress. She has developed not only her 'chops,' but also a sense of responsibility to each production. As a result, she was extremely troubled when she landed in a youth production whose director was far too casual, missing appointments, rushing through rehearsals, and treating the production as 'just a kid's show.' Two weeks into rehearsals, after great soul-searching, for the first time ever, she decided to drop out of the show."

How can parents and teachers shore up the child's flagging spirits? Adults need to allay the child's sense of distress and encourage him to persevere. Of course, eg/pg children have an aversion to bribery, so parents and teachers will need to avoid ploys and bribes as motivators. Instead, a simple acknowledgement of the child's dilemma serves as a validation of the importance of the child's work. Beyond understanding, the savvy parent or educator will need to strive to give the child whatever instruction is needed in order to help the child reach his internal ideal.

My very visual-spatial daughter, now nine, began taking ballet lessons in September. She started with a ballet I class in order to learn the five basic positions, the correct posture, and foundational ballet terminology. Within two months she was begging me to teach her how to execute more advanced movements such as turns and leaps. While she did not yet posses the muscle memory for correct body placement for such turns, she intellectually grasped the sequential movements needed for execution. After I showed her how to do the turns, she spent a day practicing. Within a short time she was crying with frustration. She had seen the older dancers in their rehearsals and knew that her pirouettes did not look like theirs.

With occasional instruction from me, Scarlet learned to feel her body in space as it turned. She taught herself to sense a correct placement for her ribcage, her head, and her shoulders. She "felt" it when she was leaning too far back. She worked a little each day to achieve the mastery of the turn, and within a week was performing serviceable pirouettes similar to those taught to level III students. By January, Scarlet was taking the ballet III class, her technique almost indistinguishable from that of the students who have been dancing for three years.

**Accelerate, Accelerate, Accelerate**

Educating eg/pg children is a process fraught with complexities at every turn. Parents and teachers alike shudder at the thought of acceleration. Concerns about social fit, academic holes in skill mastery, and scheduling conflicts arise any time acceleration is suggested. Yet, research proves again and again the value of

acceleration for eg/pg children (Gross, 1994).

The eg/pg child may have unusual expectations regarding the level of depth and intention required of him. One of the hallmarks of the exceptionally and profoundly gifted child is a propensity toward creating elaborate mental scenarios for all interactions requiring the creation and development of plot and relationships for characters. When integrated in a classroom of less gifted students, the eg/pg child may expect to bring such complexities to the fore, and find himself thwarted by the other children's inability to engage in the dynamic.

The highly focused eg/pg child may find himself frustrated with age-segregated drama classes. An older class may be the perfect fit for a child who wants to engage in meaningful theater work. Classes for children two to eight years older will not only provide intellectual stimulation, but dedicated students who match the intensity and intention of the younger eg/pg child.

Last fall, my middle son, Antony, at age eleven, began taking a weekly theater/voice class for 9-12 year-olds. Within several weeks he came home from class depressed and frustrated. After one month, he came home each week crying. The other students often talked, laughed, and played with one another during class. Antony found their boisterous behavior disconcerting as he envisioned serious theater instruction and meaningful student interaction as the purpose for attending. He wanted to get down to the business of acting.

Thankfully, both his theater and voice teachers saw that he was more serious and focused than the first-level students, and they promoted him to the next level. Surrounded by students as old as fourteen, Antony began to enjoy his class. Finding his talents and intention matched by those of some other students, Antony brought his considerable ability to focus to bear on his problem of singing off-key. Within a month he had trained his ear to "hear" the notes properly and he then began working on finer aspects of singing such as volume and annunciation. Now, four months later, the class is working on two plays and is learning how to harmonize.

One mother of a profoundly gifted twelve-year-old, now an honors university sophomore, says that she has found boredom and frustration to be the two primary obstacles to her son's success with his instrument, the violin. A well-chosen acceleration may salvage a frustrated gifted child's momentum. Without such intervention, many eg/pg children lose interest in the craft and never try again.

**Choosing the Right Instructor**

Performing arts instruction must meet the eg/pg child's cognitive-ability level. Finding such instruction can be tricky for subjects that involve sequential repetitive skill mastery. Since music, voice, and dance instruction is best presented in a manner that trains the student to develop muscle memory, repetition is necessary. How can a teacher meet the eg/pg child's need for intellectual challenge while simultaneously ensuring that proper technique is acquired?

The famous violin pedagogue, Dorothy DeLay, teacher to such virtuoso performers as Itzhak Perlman, Midori, and Sarah Chang, instinctively adopted a teaching technique that brought out each student's personal best. Writing about DeLay's remarkable legacy, Barbara Sand describes a pedagogy perfectly tailored to the needs of eg/pg children, "DeLay is basically in the business of teaching her pupils how to think, and to trust their ability to do so effectively. This is a much more difficult undertaking than telling them to copy what she does, or to repeat a passage over and over until it – at least in theory – gets better." (Sand, 2000).

In her book, Teaching Genius: Dorothy DeLay and the Making of a Musician, Sand writes, "To DeLay, learning and thinking are inextricably connected, and the core of her philosophy lies in continually challenging her students to look for their own answers. This requires tremendous imagination on the part of a teacher, because what may serve as a catalyst to understanding for one student may be a turn-off for another." (Sand, 2000)

Professional instruction may be found through a conservatory, a performing arts school, a local college or university, and even private instruction. Some parents look for teachers who are, themselves, eg/pg (DeLay's IQ is reported to be 180, as measured by the Stanford Binet L-M, making her profoundly gifted). Sometimes professional concert performers have a facility with teaching and may demonstrate their highly professional standards by accepting only very talented students. One particularly frustrated mother found the perfect violin teacher, a Julliard graduate and recorded international concert violinist, for her profoundly gifted eleven-year-old son through a recommendation from a university music department. In months, the young man accomplished more with his new teacher than he had in six years with previous teachers.

Describing the frustrating job of finding appropriate instruction for her son, she said, "My son couldn't stand repetitive drills. He would not do what previous instructors asked him to do because they would not explain why it was important and how it fit with the gestalt of playing the instrument. Granted, at eleven, he is older now and able to tolerate more than when he was four, but the approach he requires from a teacher is basically the same."

She continues, "His teacher understands how he learns, how he needs to see for himself that something is necessary before he will make the changes that she has requested, that it does, indeed, make it easier to play. She is empathetic to those needs and is patient when working with them. She gives him a variety of material to work on that achieves the same goal. She points out how the patterns of scales will show up time and again in works he will play and to know those patterns by heart will make sight reading so much easier. He now works on his scales

regularly because he has seen this to be true." (private communication, 2001).

We learned the importance of finding the right instructor through hardship. Octavian began taking classical guitar lessons when he was twelve. His teacher, a local musician and college guitar instructor, came highly recommended. His reputation as an amazing musician convinced me of his ability as an instructor and I eagerly signed Octavian up for his first month's lessons.

Quickly, we found his personality and style to be incompatible with Octavian's. Not only was he too dry, but he could not seem to grasp the fact that Octavian needed something more stimulating than the simple little exercises given him. Within two weeks my son no longer wanted to continue his lessons. By month's end, we decided to terminate the association.

In spite of telling the instructor about Octavian's academic acceleration, he did not seem to understand that happy-face stickers applied to my son's completed weekly practice sheets only demoralized Octavian. The eg/pg child's aversion to coercion and bribery was clearly evidenced by Octavian's distress.

Within the year, Octavian began taking private lessons with the classical guitar instructor at the College of William and Mary. As a matriculating student, Octavian was required to practice daily, attend master classes and local classical guitar concerts, and gain the mastery of specific songs in his college level repertoire. The instructor introduced music theory immediately. He expected Octavian to begin reading music with no delay.

Octavian blossomed into a competent –indeed, inspired musician almost overnight. Within a month he was able to read simple music and within three he could sight read almost anything haltingly. The addition of music theory to the physical repetition of daily practice challenged Octavian intellectually.

At some point in the evolution of their instruction, some eg/pg gifted children may face the crucial nexus point of choosing between two teachers within a certain discipline. Many choose the instructor who is exacting, demanding, challenging, or especially thorough. One mom tells, "Zoe, an eleven-year-old profoundly gifted singer, reported that an acquaintance had switched music teachers in disgust. The child had told Zoe that all she wanted to do was sing and the discarded teacher 'wasted' lesson time on 'boring stuff' like preventive medicine (how to keep the voice healthy and avoid polyps), vocal production, and anatomy. Zoe was stunned – she sees all that 'boring stuff' as crucial information for a serious singer."(private communication, 2002).

Parents have reported their children abandoning beloved teachers who showered them with praise to work with task-masters intent upon achievement of skill mastery, flawless technical execution, and contemplation of the subtleties of theory and interpretation. Really good instructors recognize when a student is ready to move on to a more skilled instructor, and may assist the family in finding a new teacher.

The switch to more technically challenging instructors may require greater sacrifices of parents, both in time and money. Juggling schedules to accommodate frequent practices, concerts, competitions, auditions, and rehearsals is only part of the sacrifice parents will make for their child. Financially, these needs can become overwhelming. Costumes, performance fees, new instruments, travel expenses, tuition, and other costs tax family budgets when gifted children become immersed in the pursuit of a craft. (Sloane, 1985).

In spite of such challenges, families find their lives enriched by their commitment to the child's discipline. Once again, the nature vs. nurture dialectic requires parents and educators to find ways to facilitate the appropriate instruction of the performing eg/pg child while respecting the child's learning style and personality.

**Conclusion**

These children posses amazing gifts and abilities. Those gifts and abilities provide the blueprint for their future successes. It is our job, as parents and teachers, to help them fashion for themselves the tools they need to realize their goals and maximize their potential. We can only do this if we understand their needs and strive to meet those needs.

Utilizing solid gifted education research, some of which has existed since the 1920's, parents and teachers can deal with the affective, cognitive, and instructional issues of education for eg/pg children. Applying this advice to performing arts instruction, we find a myriad of ways to facilitate the dreams of eg/pg children poised to achieve. With the right instructor to show them how to attain their goals and a supportive family environment, nothing can stop these amazing kids from achieving.

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## The Re-Invention of the Educational Wheel *by Michael E. Walters Center for the Study of the Humanities in the Schools*

". . . .there is nothing so interesting to people as other people. This interest is in part curiosity, but fundamentally it grows out of the conviction that personality is the most important thing in the world and, puzzling though it must be, we must try to understand it. In our endeavor to do this, we find ourselves following trails in the biographies that we read – seeking to understand the qualities that have made a human being feel, suffer, and act, triumph or fail, in the drama of human existence." (**Modern Biography** by Hyde and Garrett, 1945).

One of the phenomena that any teacher experiences is the fact that educational theories are constantly being recycled. Most of the time, the exponents of a new educational theory lack an awareness that their concept is a "dumbed-down" version of the original theory. Recently, I found an old textbook that was used in the New York School System. The book is, **Modern Biography** by Marietta Hyde and Zuleime Garrett (Harcourt, Brace & Co.). It was originally published in 1926, and Garrett revised it in 1945. The book is a collection of short selections from biographies of noteworthy persons from various disciplines. The range of these subjects are from literature (Mark Twain and Clifton Fadiman), the sciences and technology (the Wright brothers, George Washington Carver, Madam Curie and Louis Pasteur), and political leaders (Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill).

To gifted students, biographies are integral to their sensibilities. "Thus, what is acquired by reading may be integrated into definite thought and action patterns and interests, ambitions, and appreciations may be developed – appreciations of the oneness of all humanity." (p. 3). One of the major concepts in gifted education is learning through mental processing tasks. However, processing is based on rigorous content – not just factual content but the emotions that gifted individuals use when processing information and ideas. One of the educational buzz-words in teacher training is the importance of "doing research." Yet, research can be retroactive as well as being based on making new discoveries. One of the great leaps in human thought took place during the Renaissance, which was the re-discovery and application of the lost wisdom of the past – i.e., Greek and Latin thinkers. As an example, Shakespeare's tragedies (e.g., Julius Caesar) had their basis in Plutarch's **Parallel Lives** (75 A.C.E.).

At the end of each biographical selection in this book, there are a series of questions described as Trails to Follow. Some examples of these Trails following the Mark Twain selection are: Mark Twain's ideas about literary composition, his humor, his cynicism, and Mark Twain and his Mother. The students write reports on these themes and then they collaborate in a general discussion. The period of the 1920s through the 1940s were very productive for the public schools. Among the obvious readers of **Modern Biography** would have been students who were gifted in the sciences and social leadership. Not a bad legacy to be re-examined and understood.

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Organization/Address: Gifted Education Press
10201 YUMA CT
MANASSAS, VA 20109

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